

AN ANALYSIS OF EVENTS LEADING  
TO THE CHINESE INVASION OF VIETNAM

Luanne J. Smith



# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



# THESIS

AN ANALYSIS OF EVENTS LEADING  
TO THE CHINESE INVASION OF VIETNAM

by

Luanne J. Smith

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TO THE CHINESE INVASION OF VIETNAM

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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from the

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September 1980

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on events in Southeast Asia which contributed to the causes of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979. It is shown that Vietnam was largely responsible for the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict and for the internal political chaos within Cambodia after 1975; that local hostilities on the Indochinese peninsula were intimately related to worldwide communist/anti-communist struggles and to the Sino-Soviet dispute; and that the Chinese invasion of Vietnam was largely in response to the earlier Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.





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## I. INTRODUCTION

This study of events in Southeast Asia between the withdrawal of the American forces from Saigon, April 30, 1975, and the launching of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, February 17, 1979, is intended to examine three major hypotheses:

First: that the diplomatic and military initiatives of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were largely responsible for the S.R.V.-Cambodian conflict and for the internal political chaos within Cambodia;

Second: that local hostilities on the Indochinese peninsula were intimately related to worldwide communist/anti-communist struggles and to the Sino-Soviet dispute; and

Third: that the Chinese invasion of Vietnam was largely in response to the earlier Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

Chapter II describes the situation in Vietnam and Cambodia as it appeared at the moment of the Vietnamese victory, April 30, 1975. Chapter III analyzes the diplomatic moves and military adjustments during the remainder of the year 1975 showing how the S.R.V. began the process of adjusting itself to its neighbors; balanced its relations with China against those with the U.S.S.R. and endeavored to establish





some sort of beneficial relationship with the U.S. Chapter IV continues the story, with its identical themes through 1976 and 1977, showing the increasing frustrations of the S.R.V. in Cambodia and the mounting determination for hegemony in the Indochinese peninsula, even at the cost of the war. Chapter V analyzes the combination of negotiating and fighting throughout the remainder of 1977 and 1978, culminating in the Christmas, 1978, Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the resultant Chinese invasion of Vietnam, beginning February 17, 1979.

The methodology for this thesis is the examination of events in the period indicated as those events were reported by journalists on the spot (relying primarily on the New York Times and the Far Eastern Economic Review) and as they were interpreted by the major powers involved--Vietnam, Cambodia, China, the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. Such primary sources as government documents, whether originals or as reported in the Federal Broadcast Information Services are used wherever available. Opinions of qualified observers, academicians and other analysts are quoted whenever valuable or pertinent.



## II. AFTER THE VICTORY: APRIL, 1975

This chapter will indicate the emergence of the basic policies of the S.R.V. immediately after the achievement of victory over the U.S.-South Vietnam opposition. It will be seen that the S.R.V. actively pursued its interests with Cambodia, apparently to solidify its strength as opposed to a hostile and possibly formidable neighbor. It also becomes clear that the S.R.V. did not hesitate to take stands in opposition to China and leaning towards the U.S.S.R. Hanoi likewise endeavored to play its American card as skillfully as possible. The scenario described in this chapter is that which existed when the U.S. forces finally left Saigon at the end of April, 1975.

### A. RESIDUAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA

Immediately after victory over its enemies, Vietnam took steps to take over some of Cambodian islands despite the fact that in 1967 the two communist parties (Cambodia and Vietnam) agreed to the division of islands by the Brévié Line--a demarcation instituted by the French.<sup>1</sup>

One Vietnamese senior official later admitted, "At the time we agreed to the Brévié Line we were not aware of problems of territorial water, continental shelf, etc.--those new phenomena."<sup>2</sup> Notable, Poulo Wai island contested by the Vietnamese is located on the Khmer continental



shelf.<sup>3</sup> Vietnam, in its moment of generosity to an ally, was also not aware of the presence of oil in the Gulf of Thailand.

South Vietnam conducted one final patriotic venture in September 1974 when it disputed with the Lon Nol government over the status of Poulo Wai Island. The Cambodians supported by a foreign oil firm were conducting drilling operations there. Although the South Vietnamese had previously appeared willing in recent months to allow the Cambodian's Poulo Wai if Cambodia agreed on a territorial demarcation allowing it the island of Phu Quoc, Cambodia decided against agreement on the issue at that time. South Vietnam reacted by sending a note on August 29 threatening "misfortune" to the oil rig if drilling continued beyond September 12. The garrison of ten Khmer soldiers stationed on the island since the overthrow of Sihanouk in 1970 were thereupon augmented by 300 more troops on September 5. Lon Nol pointed out that Cambodia had been drilling since 1972, and South Vietnamese had not reacted before. The major difference in attitude was due to South Vietnam's desire to win public support to its side over Hanoi. A confrontation was averted when the oil company decided to move to uncontested waters, and the final decision on the islands was postponed until the end of hostilities. Vietnam also undertook to amend the land border with Cambodia in the rice-growing region of the Parrot's Beak.



The area east of the Mekong in Cambodia is noted for its rubber plantations and its vast quantities of rice. It was in this region that Vietnam held its sanctuaries during the Second Indochinese War. Sporadic clashes in this area occurred in 1973 and 1974, with the aim of evicting an unreliable ally who, it was widely believed, wished to remain to benefit from the Parrot's Beak region's ample resources.

The Khmer Rouge were not the only ones to suspect Hanoi's intentions; General Fernandez, Lon Nol's Chief of Staff, offered on December 3, 1974, to conduct joint operations with the Khmer Rouge to drive the Vietnamese from their Cambodian enclaves. Fernandez claimed that the North Vietnamese-Viet Cong controlled one-third of Cambodia east of the Mekong with no intention of leaving. He believed the Vietnamese were a greater threat to Cambodia than the Khmer Rouge.<sup>4</sup> Although the Khmer Rouge rejected the offer, it make every attempt in 1974 to dislodge the Viet Cong and longtime Vietnamese residents in the area east of the Mekong whom the Khmer Rouge suspected of having sympathies with the Viet Cong.<sup>5</sup> Trying to maintain its position in Cambodia, Vietnam at the end of 1974 approached China for a revision of the borders in Hanoi's favor, but China refused.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Vietnam did have intentions to remain in Cambodia.

In March 1975 border battles reportedly erupted between the Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese. The Khmer





Rouge were at that time ready to make their final drive on Phnom Penh. North Vietnam may have seen its opportunity to establish control over the coveted border regions before Pol Pot and his forces could establish themselves in Phnom Penh. Around this time Sihanouk emphatically proclaimed that the Khmer Rouge were not puppets of the Hanoi regime and averred that Cambodia would pursue a policy of non-alignment and neutrality.<sup>7</sup> In Cambodia's declaration of independence were the seeds of its downfall. While a more subservient state may have acceded to Vietnam's territorial requests to promote unity among fraternal socialist countries, Cambodia demanded equality in its relations with Vietnam. This meant a temporary setback for Vietnam's desire to annex the oil rich islands of the Gulf of Thailand and to increase its real estate holdings in Cambodia.

#### B. CHINESE INTERESTS IN INDOCHINA

As early as December 1973, Vietnam informed China of its intentions to prospect for oil in the Gulf of Tonkin and proposed talks for demarcating a border. China agreed, with the condition that third parties remain away from the Gulf.

The last shot ending the second Indochinese War in 1975 had not been fired when Vietnam undertook the liberation of several islands claimed by China in the Spratly Island chain. China was taken aback, as Pham Van Dong himself had



in 1956 concurred with China's claims to both the Spratly and Paracel Islands, and Vietnam verbally agreed to China's claims in 1954 and 1958.<sup>8</sup> (Phan Van Dong, one of the four leaders of Vietnam later discounted this pledge in 1977 saying "that was the war period and I had to say that.") On September 6, 1973, South Vietnam announced that it would incorporate the Spratly Islands into Phuoc Tuy Province and subsequently stationed troops on Nam Yit.<sup>9</sup>

In January 1974, China, in a wave of patriotism and a possible reaction to the island fortification policy of South Vietnam to prevent similar S.V.N. action in the Paracels, reaffirmed its claims to both the Spratly and Paracel Island chains, backing up its statement by landing a group of Chinese fishermen who planted a Chinese flag on Robert Island in the Paracels.<sup>10</sup> The South Vietnamese responded to China's January 11 claim by declaring it would take "appropriate actions to protect South Vietnamese sovereignty and territorial integrity," and proceeded to move patrol boats into the area resulting on January 16 in the first of several clashes with the Chinese. China brought in an amphibious force and bombed the islands compelling the South Vietnamese to retreat from the superior on-scene Chinese defenders (or aggressors, depending on one's point of view). The South Vietnamese were forced to abandon a weather station it had maintained on Pattle Island since 1932, and left the Paracels to full Chinese control on January 20.<sup>11</sup>



Radio Peking on January 21 warned that the South Vietnamese would have to bear the consequences if it continued its aggressions against China, possibly hinting that the Spratlys would be next in line to be attacked.<sup>12</sup>

Following these incidents, S.V.N. fearing an attack moved 120 soldiers into the Spratlys.<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. refused to get involved in the matter, while the U.S.S.R.--at first--refrained from making any statement at all, reporting instead Chinese and U.S. official statements of the events. However, the U.S.S.R. changed its stance in February claiming China was exhibiting its chauvinistic policy and greed for oil. Although the U.S.S.R.'s own atlases identified the Paracels and Spratlys as being Chinese territory, the U.S.S.R. did not want the Chinese to press for other land claims which could directly affect the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> Despite Soviet claims, China obviously saw the affair as a patriotic conflict while South Vietnam fought a losing battle for Vietnam's historical claims. North Vietnam's reaction to the situation was muted. When asked at a news conference on January 19, 1974, who owned the Paracels, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong representatives responded "no comment." Analysts believed the North Vietnamese were embarrassed by the incident as they had long portrayed themselves as the patriotic defenders of the fatherland.<sup>15</sup> When South Vietnam renewed the diplomatic offensive in March 1974, Hanoi finally broke its long





silence. Hanoi issued a short statement calling for peaceful discussions on this issue.<sup>16</sup>

The island disputes of 1974 aggravated longstanding historical disputes. But most importantly, these disputes allowed Hanoi--no longer Saigon--to become the spokesman for all Vietnam. Hanoi's actions in 1975 represented legitimate national interests although they would certainly be opposed by the conflicting positions of Cambodia and China.

In April 1975, in the flush of its victories in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese regime launched a campaign to recover the Spratlys and the islands in the Gulf of Thailand. Hanoi later said that China claimed the Spratlys but in fact these islands were occupied by the Americans and their puppets. North Vietnam therefore disregarded historical claims and regarded possession as the most important criteria. China was disturbed that Vietnam had taken over the islands without negotiation; however, it declined to use military intervention to remedy the situation possibly because Soviet naval units would have been in the position to interfere.

On April 27 Soviet units completed their annual Spring exercise. This was the first time the Soviets operated in the South China Sea, only 250 miles from Shanghai. On April 14, the Spratlys were taken. Cambodia, on the other hand, was less reticent publicly proclaiming on April 28 that it absolutely prohibited foreign bases on its territory.<sup>17</sup> At that time, besides North Vietnamese forces on Cambodian islands, 20,000 North Vietnamese troops were



reported along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Parrot's Beak and further West.<sup>18</sup> Cambodia was unwilling to part with an inch of its soil and was conducting an island war with Vietnam at the moment of Hanoi's victory over Saigon.

#### C. CHANGING POSITIONS OF THE U.S. IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The U.S. had some influence with Hanoi contributing to the return of Poulo Wai Island to the Khmer Rouge. In a May 1 North Vietnamese victory statement, Giap sent greetings to the U.S. and wishes for peaceful and friendly relations while not mentioning U.S. involvement in Indochina.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, perhaps signaling its economic independence from China, Pham Van Dong on June 3 offered to ~~normal~~ize relations with the U.S. if the U.S. would implement its 1973 pledge of aid to Hanoi. Hanoi's offer was the first made publicly in one and a half years by a senior North Vietnamese official on the subject.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. rejected the aid requirement but left open the door to normalization, with concomitant U.S. economic associations and a lifting of the trade embargo on that country. Though Vietnam was not yet willing to drop its aid requirement, its broaching the subject indicated that it was laying the groundwork for the future U.S.-Vietnam relationship. This provided the U.S. with a modicum of diplomatic leverage which it used.

Poulo Wai Island fell to the Vietnamese on June 10, 1975, causing Pol Pot to make a hasty visit to Peking,



followed by a flight to Hanoi.<sup>21</sup> The situation was critical, threatening to escalate into major warfare. On June 13, Phnom Penh radio mysteriously failed to broadcast at the 6 a.m. and 11 a.m. time slots possibly signifying a major reappraisal of Cambodian policies was taking place.<sup>22</sup> In late June fighting was reported in the Parrot's Beak area and was confirmed by Secretary Kissinger.<sup>23</sup>

Although the U.S. was still smarting from the May Mayaguez incident, Secretary Kissinger on June 18 warned countries against throwing their weight around Asia and said that U.S. normalization of relations depended on both a state's "conduct to their neighbors and their attitude towards us." Kissinger warned against countries using a preponderance of power or blackmail to reach their aims. Although Kissinger was primarily trying to show continued U.S. interest in Southeast Asia to allay the fears of ASEAN and Japan about Hanoi, the statements were equally applicable to Hanoi for its relations with Cambodia.<sup>24</sup>

Kissinger's confirmation of Vietnamese-Cambodian problems in late June showed that the U.S. was concerned about the situation in Indochina. Hanoi would be jeopardizing a future economic relationship with the U.S. if it continued its aggressive stance against Cambodia and would further alienate Southeast Asian states who were suspicious of North Vietnam's intentions in the first place. The extent of U.S. influence on Hanoi's decision to return the island of Poulo Wai is undetermined though it would constitute at least one



reason for Hanoi to take its fight against Cambodia underground. A pattern of U.S. policy towards Vietnam emerged as the U.S. used the normalization of relations "bait" consistently throughout the next few years in an attempt to place some controls on Vietnam's behavior. Also evident were the beginnings of a U.S.-Chinese partnership concerning Indochinese affairs and the bridging of Vietnam.

An interesting footnote to the Cambodian delegation's visit to Peking in mid-August was the relative treatment given to that delegation and to the Vietnamese delegation that preceded it to Peking just one day earlier (August 14). The Vietnamese economic delegation led by Le Thanh Nghi arrived to a cool but correct meeting but was not allowed to see Teng Hsiao-ping. Cambodia's delegation, however, due in part to the fact that the trip to Peking was the first public visit outside the country by that state's leaders since the April victory, received an extremely warm welcome with an editorial on the first page of Jenmin Jih Pao extolling the event.<sup>25</sup> The stark contrast, though, was due to a multitude of factors in addition to Cambodian-Vietnamese problems which were causing a rapid deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

#### D. INDOCHINA AND THE SINO SOVIET CONFLICT

In the midst of the turmoil between the two states, Prince Sihanouk was formally invited to return to Cambodia







(July 18, 1975).<sup>26</sup> Sihanouk was long supported by China as the only leader that could coalesce the disparate groups in Cambodia to ensure that it remained an independent state. He was not a beloved figure to the Khmer Rouge, however, as he fought Khmer Rouge guerrillas while he was in power in the pre-1970's. His return may have been the price China charged to help mediate the conflict in Phnom Penh's favor.

On July 26, Phnom Penh aired a broadcast stressing peaceful coexistence among Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. Vietnam returned two small islands, Koh Tonsay and Poulo Wai, to Phnom Penh and Le Duan, the head of the Communist Party of Vietnam paid a formal visit to the Cambodian capital. Messages of friendship and good will were exchanged<sup>27</sup> but tensions continued to stir beneath the placid surface. Less than two weeks after Le Duan's visit to Phnom Penh, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan led a high level Cambodian delegation to Peking where they may have obtained in an August 18 aid agreement a provision for patrol boats to protect its island holdings. While enroute a visit with Sihanouk who was visiting North Korea, Khieu Samphan was reported to have visited the Luta naval shipyards where the items of interest were patrol boats.<sup>28</sup> The mid-August visit to Peking, however, probably provided more than military aid assurances, as the technical and economic aid agreement contained an anti-hegemony clause which could be viewed as advantageous to both Peking and Phnom Penh.<sup>29</sup> Of interest, the delegation also met with



Hua Kuo-feng, who was then Minister of Public Security. Hua's presence was considered unusual for talks with a foreign delegation.

By way of summary it should be noted that the S.R.V. has its own version of the events of early 1975, including the conflicts with Cambodia and China. The S.R.V. blamed Cambodia for aggression over the islands<sup>30</sup> and let it be known that old quarrels between China and the Sayon regime would have to be reexamined as issues between equal socialist sovereign states.

At the moment of victory, the S.R.V. had little to fear from Cambodia or Laos. All that was required on the part of the S.R.V. was to build up its own internal strength so that the S.R.V. could adopt a defense-by-offense policy if that seemed to be called for in dealing with Cambodia or Laos. No one could be certain whether at some time in the future the S.R.V. would be content with its existing position on the Indochinese peninsula or would seek hegemony in some sort of Indochina Federation. A latent fear existed in some quarters that the S.R.V., inflated by its victory, might go beyond Indochina and seek a greater destiny as the leading power in all of Southeast Asia.

Whatever the future, it seemed clear in the Spring of 1975, the S.R.V. was first obliged to get its relations in order with its allies and supporters, China and the U.S.S.R.

In looking towards China, the S.R.V. was aware of the fact that Chou En lai was still alive and so was Mao



Tse-tung. Ling Hsiao ping was ostensibly in power but he was in the shadow of the gang of four. The S.R.V. would have to prepare alternatives in dealing with future China--whether China would continue as a revolutionary model or whether it would seriously embark on the "ominous" (from the point of view of the S.R.V.) program of the four modernizations.

As for the U.S.S.R., the S.R.V. regarded the U.S.S.R. as its military mentor, respected socialist ally, and most likely source of advice and help for future development. The S.R.V. was entirely aware of the Sino-Soviet split and of the difficulties of carrying water on both shoulders. The S.R.V. was geographically in the shadow of China and therefore in constant danger of invasion. The U.S.S.R. was distant but powerful. The S.R.V. was constrained to maintain friendship with both, if possible, but to choose wisely if forced to make a choice.

It was still too early to determine whether the S.R.V. could establish any kind of detente with the U.S. The scars of war were too deep to promise any steps towards early reconciliation.



### III. PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE: 1975

At the moment of victory in Indochina it was clear that an old era had come to an end. The preoccupation of the victor throughout 1975 and into 1976 was to consolidate its victory and to prepare for a stronger future. This chapter begins with an analysis of the S.R.V.'s relations with its neighbors--Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines. It then explores S.R.V. policies toward China (increasingly unfriendly) and toward the U.S.S.R. (increasingly friendly). After an analysis of the S.R.V. demarilies towards the U.S., the chapter ends with an overview of the situation on the Indochina peninsula as the year 1975 drew to a close.

#### A. THE S.R.V. AND ITS NEIGHBORS

Since 1930 Hanoi either overtly or covertly supported a federation of the Indochinese states comprised of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam in which Vietnam would have the dominant position. Therefore, the S.R.V. first turned attention to Cambodia, with whom it was in perennial conflict over the disputed islands, the border territories and the proper relationships between the Khmer Rouge and the government of the S.R.V. As Pol Pot, backed by China, increased his power in Phnom Penh, the S.R.V. felt obliged to send increasing numbers of troops into Cambodia to oppose him. The Vietnamese mounted a major offensive against the





Khmer Rouge in April 1975 without even informing China of their plans.<sup>1</sup>

One probable reason why China was left ignorant of the timing was because a Vietnamese invasion of the Spratlys was part of the strategy devised by the Soviets and their Vietnamese colleagues. If China were made aware of the precise moment for the launching of the offensive, it might have decided to insure its position in the Spratlys, thereby preempting Vietnam's capture of the islands. Knowledge that the Soviets were involved in the planning of this event would surely have intensified Chinese suspicions regarding selfish Soviet motives in the whole of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it was wise for Vietnam to keep China in ignorance about the Cambodia drive in order to forestall massive or even significant amounts of aid from China to Cambodia. Logically, if Vietnam had any pretensions of pushing Cambodia into the Indochinese Federation that it so long talked about, it had to do so before China invested too much aid and comfort in the Khmer Rouge.

Vietnam showed a paralled concern for its influence in Laos, where Peking actively opposed any Vietnamese effort to incorporate Laos in an Indochinese Federation.<sup>2</sup> The Vietnamese made substantial inroads with the Pathet Lao whom they actively supported militarily despite their denials. At one point in 1973, 60,000-70,000 North Vietnamese troops provided assistance to the Pathet Lao although the



number was reduced to approximately 30,000 by April 1973-- about the same number which remains in Laos today.<sup>3</sup> By itself, however, Vietnam could not hope to destroy the reservoir of good will that China had meticulously created for itself in Laos where a large presence of 14,000 road workers provided assistance and engaged in proselytizing efforts. To undermine Chinese influence Vietnam needed a partner that could provide adequate financial inducements to tilt the balance. In June the influx of Soviet advisors began to arrive and the U.S.S.R. embassy staff increased to 100 persons; it was obvious who that partner was to be.<sup>4</sup> Laotian actions against Thailand throughout the summer gave preliminary indications of such a shift to the detriment of Chinese policy goals.<sup>5</sup>

From its neighbors in Indochina, the S.R.V. turned its attention to Thailand which was an uneasy target because of its association with the U.S. in the Indochina hostilities. Thailand's incentive for reevaluating its policies was due to its proximity to contested regions in Indochina. On 21 March Thailand declared that it would no longer allow the U.S. use of its bases in Thailand for airlifting materiel to the beleaguered regime in Cambodia; further, it announced that it was planning to recognize the new regime when it came to power. On 1 May, just one day after Vietnam demanded Thailand return 125 aircraft that had been flown to that country, Thailand obtained agreement from the U.S. to



withdraw 9,000 of its 25,000 troops stationed in that country in an initial phased withdrawal to be completed within a year. The U.S. continued to reiterate its commitment to stand by Thailand via defense arrangements should the need arise.<sup>7</sup> Thailand emphasized its new stance on 14 May when it strongly protested U.S. use of Thai bases against Cambodia during the Mayaguez incident.<sup>8</sup>

Vietnam hoped to encourage Thailand's initial steps to eliminate the U.S. presence and assumed the "carrot" approach by sending Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien to Thailand in the latter half of May. Relations seemed to be on the upswing but Thailand was also making initiatives towards China which resulted in normalization of relations on 1 July. Undoubtedly Premier Kukrit received China's assurances on Cambodia's non-hostile intentions towards Thailand and a full briefing on Peking's perceptions of Hanoi's aims. Relations between Thailand and Vietnam became noticeably strained as Thailand had a new patron to ensure its independence and no longer felt it necessary to succumb to Hanoi's pressuring. China's entry in place of the receding American presence must have been viewed as an anathema to the Vietnamese who repeatedly referred to Thailand as War Zone D and maintained a logistics network originating in Hanoi to supply the Thai insurgents.<sup>9</sup>

With the Pathet Lao victory in Laos, border tensions between Laos and Thailand grew sharper. Throughout the



summer, the Thais protested against the influx of Laos refugees and the Laos accused the Thais of planting counter insurgents in the refugee camps. The Vietnamese insisted that that Thais were really a cover for nefarious American purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Hanoi dropped its pretense of friendship with the Thais and accused Thailand of providing the jumping off area for reactionaries against all three Indochinese regimes. It denounced Thailand's planned August naval exercises with the United States and repeated its insistence that the Americans should be driven out of Thai bases as soon as possible.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the S.R.V. should have realized that in encouraging the Thais to expel the Americans, the Vietnamese were paving the way for closer Thai-Chinese relations. It could be expected that the Thais would seek help wherever they could find it in opposing the Vietnamese juggernaut as it approached ever closer through Cambodia.

Hanoi pursued a cautious policy toward the Philippines. Go early as October 1974, President Marcos had called an emergency meeting of the Philippine Foreign Policy and National Security Councils to speed the normalization of relations between China and the U.S.S.R. Along these lines, Marcos on April 11 conferred by decree citizenship on 100,000 ethnic Chinese, thereby removing their stateless status and a bone of contention with China.<sup>12</sup> The Philippines worried that U.S. statements of intent were not







backed up by the U.S. Congress (as exhibited in U.S. refusal to aid either South Vietnam or Cambodia in the final stage of war).<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, on April 18, the same day that ASEAN recognized Cambodia (from then on Kampuchea), President Marcos called a policy meeting to discuss abrogation of the mutual defense treaty with the U.S. and the return of Clark Air Force Base and Subic Naval Base to Philippines' control.<sup>14</sup> Marcos was disposed to disassociate himself as far as possible from his single alternative of complete dependence on the U.S.

While Vietnamese-Thai relations deteriorated, Vietnam attempted to improve relations with the Philippines possibly to show Thailand how friendly relations could be between a Communist and a non-Communist state if the latter chose to align itself with Hanoi. Although the Philippines were making much noise about kicking out the U.S., it never made any concrete reduction of U.S. presence as did the Thais. Though the Philippines and Thailand simultaneously normalized relations with China, this apparently did not cause much acrimony in Hanoi as Vietnam on August 7 unilaterally normalized relations with Manila. This was reportedly accomplished by Vietnam's pressuring a Philippine diplomat who was in Vietnam trying to ascertain the fate of Filipinos trapped in South Vietnam with the fall of Saigon. Though the diplomat lacked the powers to take such a step, Hanoi loudly proclaimed the diplomatic achievement. Despite Manila's informing Hanoi that the normalization was



unilateral and thus invalid, Phan Hien declared in a October 10 interview that the normalization of relations was based on three principles, one of which was agreement to prohibit a third country's use of their territories as a base to attack neighboring countries or each other.<sup>15</sup> Hanoi's attempt, apparently, was to neutralize U.S. forces on the Philippines even if they remained on Filipino soil.

In addition to these initiatives, the S.R.V. stepped up its efforts to strengthen insurgency movements in potentially unfriendly countries. After the fall of Saigon, Hanoi found itself heir to at least three billion dollars<sup>16</sup> worth of modern military equipment which Peking believed would be used by Vietnam to obtain leadership in insurgency movements in Southeast Asia and elsewhere at the expense of China. Reports that Vietnam was making contacts with Middle Eastern and African countries to peddle the merchandise appeared to substantiate those fears.<sup>17</sup> Concurrently, Vietnam was making inroads in the Thai and Malaysian Communist parties. A schism was reported in the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in which youthful pro-Hanoi elements were opposing the old-style Maoist concepts of winning the loyalty of the peasantry to capture the countryside and were opting instead for fermenting revolution in the cities.<sup>18</sup> The upswing in urban terrorism in Malaysia in the summer of 1975 also signified a similar schism had occurred in the Malaysian Communist Party (MCP).



Concerned that its inaction with the insurgency movements would provide an opening for Vietnamese, hence Soviet, intrusions into the region, the Chinese in May issued several messages of support to the various movements urging them to continue their efforts. One message was a perfunctory acknowledgement of the 45th anniversary of the MCP which may have been a required gesture on Peking's part. Due to the increasing insurgency-inspired violence in Malaysia that had arisen since the normalization of relations between the countries, however, Kuala Lumpur claimed that China had reneged on its May commitment not to interfere in the internal politics of that country.<sup>19</sup> The MCP's wave of terrorism--aided by the arrival of sophisticated weaponry from Vietnam--showed vividly that another hand was involved in manipulation of factions within the party.<sup>20</sup> The Malaysian case confirmed Peking's apprehensions that Vietnam was attempting to exert control over the insurgency movements and that Hanoi was not averse to parting with some of its weapons to do so. More significantly, the timing of the insurgency actions closely after normalization between Malaysia and China showed that Hanoi was prepared to use its new strength to influence Chinese diplomacy in the region. By revealing Peking's apparent paradox, supporting insurgencies while courting improved state relations, Vietnam was able to increase already strong suspicions of China in Indonesia and Malaysia who were inclined to think the worst of Chinese behavior.



Three sub-themes emerge from this analysis of the activities of the S.R.V. during the remainder of 1975. These are the developing antagonism between the S.R.V. and China; the tightening of the bonds between the S.R.V. and the U.S.S.R.; and the continuing efforts to neutralize or eliminate the American presence in Southeast Asia.

#### B. DEVELOPING ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THE S.R.V. AND CHINA

China was unwilling to have Vietnam expand its control over Laos and Cambodia, especially when continuing friendly relations between Peking and Hanoi were seriously in question. China responded to the capitalist encirclement strategy in the 1960's by building an impressive network of highways in surrounding states which would allow Peking access to the water arteries in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Siam and the South China Sea affording Peking the means to obtain Third-World sources of raw materials. By necessity, China cultivated state-to-state relations with the countries in which these links to the outside world were constructed, i.e., Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Some of these roads have yet to be completed and China needed raw materials less than it required technology from industrialized nations. China's Third-World strategy was the only policy it could pursue at a time when the major industrialized nations were opposed to China's goals of modernization.







Another continuing bone of contention, intense distrust of the indigenous population in South Vietnam prevented their effective utilization in the postwar years. Instead of using the trained individuals present in South Vietnam, Hanoi introduced cadres from the north causing managerial problems in both segments of the country. In a few short years, the most distrusted of the lot, 150,000 ethnic Chinese, would find themselves forcibly ejected.

Senator Mike Mansfield's visit to China in early 1975 saw differences between China and Vietnam. In meetings with the senator, China indicated that it desired neutralist states, not necessarily Communist in orientation, in Southeast Asia. China's interest in Cambodia's future status was evident in these discussions, but it exhibited an almost total lack of interest in Vietnam<sup>21</sup> Cambodia had obviously supplanted Vietnam as China's chief protege.

An unconfirmed but credible March 1975 report circulated by Taiwan offers a glimpse of Chinese impressions of Vietnam. Chiang Ching in an address to Foreign Ministry officials was said to have described Vietnam as being "like one temple having four abbots who regard as patrons those giving gruel or cloth." This derisive statement implied that the Vietnamese leaders would beg from anyone for trifles. The wife of Mao Tse-tung continued by saying Mao had reflected that the Vietnamese people would rise against their leadership if they ascribed to the Soviet brand of communism which



which emphasized industrialization above agriculture. She also allegedly averred that Vietnam was not what it was under Ho Chi Minh who tried to reconcile Peking and Moscow and refused to take sides. Though denied by China as Republic of China propaganda, Vietnam, it was said, believed the source was China.<sup>22</sup> If accurate, the report shows Chinese disenchantment with Vietnam's pro-Soviet leanings and suspicion of Hanoi's policies from at least early 1975.

Antagonism between the S.R.V. and China became increasingly apparent during the summer of 1975. China's policies by necessity were to hinder Vietnam's outward reach which China perceived as Soviet intrusion into the area. Peking hoped to maintain Laotian neutrality by massive doses of aid, while it encouraged Cambodia to maintain a hostile stance toward both Vietnam and the Soviet Union. China supported the efforts of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for a region of peace and neutrality and hoped to strengthen that organization to insulate it further from Soviet influence. To counter Soviet influence in the insurgency movements of Southeast Asia, Peking was placed in the delicate position of providing at least nominal support of those movements while at the same time trying to internally strengthen the non-Communist regimes. China explained this situation by saying state-to-state



relations and party-to-party relations were different; thus, it could pursue both simultaneously.

In August, Le Thanh Nghi of Vietnam visited Peking to help save its deteriorating economic situation. Vietnam's massive management problems greatly increased the requirements for aid, but China was unwilling to make additional sacrifices that would further drain its own economy, and permit Vietnam to expand its influence in Laos and battle the Cambodians. China's attitudes towards Hanoi had crystallized. Vietnam's systematic approach of undermining China's position in Southeast Asia was not something China wished to reward nor further by increasing its financial commitment. During Nghi's visit, which was met by considerable coolness, the Chinese had been reported to complain about Vietnam's greediness and ingratitude to the Chinese who had so generously made sacrifices to the Vietnamese war effort against the U.S.<sup>23</sup> The ingratitude, Peking felt, was exhibited in the anti-Peking policies Vietnam had begun to adopt.

Nghi's visit was said to be of a preliminary nature, but it is probable that at this time the Vietnamese voiced their eagerness that China live up to Chou's 1973 agreement that China would continue its military and economic aid for five years after the war's end.<sup>24</sup> China's agreement, however, was contingent upon Vietnam's abiding by the 1973 peace agreement which Hanoi chose to ignore. With Vietnam's



support for insurgent movements an antithetical to Peking's policies in Southeast Asia and Hanoi's policies of territorial aggrandizement at the expense of China and its allies, China's unwillingness to continue military aid is understandable. China could not understand Vietnam's request for more weaponry at a time when Vietnam had dire economic problems,<sup>25</sup> and had several billion dollars worth of sophisticated arms and supplies acquired upon the fall of Saigon. China's major interest at this time was to persuade the S.R.V. to sign an antihegemony agreement, which of course was of no interest whatever to the S.R.V. seeking also the aid of the U.S.S.R.

Following LeThanh Nghi's visit to Peking in August, Nhan Dan began openly describing the massive economic problems that were besetting Vietnam.<sup>26</sup> The timing of these epistles suggest Vietnam was trying to convince China that it was interested only in resurrecting the Vietnamese economy and not in military conquest. A midsummer wet season lull in fighting against Cambodia was perhaps part of this policy to elicit increased funding from the Chinese. However, for reasons cited above, China was not likely to see Vietnamese activities as having pacific aims, and Peking was averse to providing massive aid of any type that would only help Hanoi become a more viable partner to the Soviets.

Le Duan arrived in Peking on 22 September for a seven-day visit which would become a turning point for







Sino-Vietnamese relations. In exchange for aid of any magnitude Vietnam would have to demonstrate its neutrality. In perhaps a last attempt to sway the Vietnamese from their partnership with the Soviets, Teng at a banquet for the visiting Vietnamese delegation warned of Soviet exploitation of those with which it had partnerships. But, just as its billions of dollars' worth of aid failed to maintain Vietnam's neutral stance between the Soviet Union and China, no amount of pleading would dissuade the Vietnamese from its pro-Soviet stance. Although Le Duan obtained two aid agreements from China they were not long term agreements of the type necessary to support Vietnam's 1976-1980 five-year plan. The aid Vietnam did receive was to serve as a reminder that there was another source available for support when Vietnam tired of being exploited by the U.S.S.R. No military aid agreement was signed, nor was there a final communique issued because China undoubtedly insisted upon an anti-hegemony clause to which Vietnam could not ascribe.<sup>27</sup>

In late October 1975, Peking and Hanoi reached a climax of confrontation. Failing to drive a wedge between Vietnam and the U.S.S.R., China adopted new diplomatic tactics in Southeast Asia. Accepting the reality of close S.R.V.-U.S.S.R. ties, China, with evidence to back up its claims of Vietnamese perfidy, could then press for an anti-Soviet, anti-Vietnamese alliance in Southeast Asia that had thus far eluded it. To counter this move, Vietnam tried to



place the onus on the Chinese for its solidifying its ties with the Soviets by implying that it had to join the Soviet camp because it had nowhere else to turn in the midst of an economic crisis within its country.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, China also intensified its propaganda campaign to Southeast Asia.<sup>29</sup> On September 26 Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua accused the Soviet Union of trying to fill the vacuum in Indo-China after the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region.<sup>30</sup> On October 5 Teng stated at a banquet that "Today the most dangerous source of war is the superpower that is the most zealous of preaching peace." Though Teng did not mention who that power was, it precipitated the first Soviet walk-out from a Chinese banquet in three years.<sup>31</sup> These and similar statements were noticeably directed against the Russians, not the Vietnamese, perhaps in the forlorn hope that the Vietnamese would eventually see through the Soviet schemes and, like the Chinese, bolt from the Soviet camp.

#### C. TIGHTENING THE BONDS BETWEEN THE S.R.V. AND THE U.S.S.R.

The Russian interest in the S.R.V. is manifest. The Russians had contributed massively to one victory of Vietnam and could be expected to be willing to pay a substantial price to turn the Vietnamese victory as far as possible to the advantage of the Russian national interest. This tactic was particularly evident throughout 1975.



The S.R.V.'s advances into Cambodia and Laos worked to the benefit of the U.S.S.R. Russian influence over a dominant Vietnam in the Indochinese peninsula meant that the U.S.S.R. would have in effect placed a pincer on China from the north and the south. The Soviet Union's naval display in its Spring exercises, operating in the East China Sea targeted against sea lanes of Japan, illustrated the point that it could blockade China from the east; with Vietnam as an ally, Cam Ranh Bay in Soviet hands would complete the naval blockade.

In early May rumors began to circulate that the Soviets had requested use of Cam Ranh Bay for both payment for extensive Soviet aid throughout the war and for future support.<sup>32</sup> Secretary of State Kissinger on May 12 denounced Soviet expansionism and warned against its moving against Southeast Asia and its acquiring Cam Ranh Bay as a naval and air facility. Vietnam denied that it would give base rights to the Soviets at Cam Ranh Bay but later indicated that it would not be averse to the Soviets using its port facilities-- a tenuous distinction which would allow Soviet naval combatants to threaten southern China.<sup>33</sup>

In late June in the midst of the territorial disputes between Vietnam and Cambodia, Teng apparently associating Vietnam's bellicose activities with the acquiescence of its patron,<sup>34</sup> formally warned of Soviet quests for bases. In July a People's Daily article expressed China's fears by



warning that the U.S.S.R. was trying to take advantage of the predilection of the Asian states for dismantling U.S. bases by "secretly sneaking into some areas to seek new bases and spheres of influence."<sup>35</sup> Hanoi officials responded to these charges averring that the U.S.S.R. would not seek bases in Vietnam because that had an "imperialist odor" attached to it; however, they said if the U.S.S.R. wished, its "ships would enjoy similar facilities at Cam Ranh Bay to ships of other friendly countries."<sup>36</sup> Later, in September when Hanoi's dependence on the Soviets became more apparent, an Izvestia article claimed that the U.S.S.R. wanted Vietnam to remain independent and had no designs on Cam Ranh Bay.<sup>37</sup>

Hanoi's acceptance of Soviet rather than Chinese instruction for the final phase of the takeover of South Vietnam signified that Hanoi would be inclined to pursue the Russian rather than the Chinese brand of communism in the future. Both China and the Soviet Union sent high-level military delegations to assist Hanoi in the final assault on Saigon, but the Soviet delegation, led by General V. G. Juklov, Chief of Staff of the U.S.S.R. armed forces, succeeded in convincing Vietnam to accept a strategy of a lightning offensive utilizing heavy armor that would cause a rapid collapse of the Saigon regime.<sup>38</sup> China cautioned Hanoi against this type of strategy suggesting Vietnam instead take a more gradual approach with a major







proselytizing effort to win the support of the population. The Soviet method would gain a swift military victory, but South Vietnam would become a huge concentration camp comprised of a hostile population impeding any attempts of the Vietnamese to advance policies of reconstruction and integration with the north. Since China's strategy would require years to accomplish, Vietnam followed the Russian advice.

In August Le Thanh Nghi visited Moscow after his disappointing reception in Peking. In Moscow he was greeted by an enthusiastic audience and a Communist editorial of 10,000 words urging the smashing of Maoism.<sup>39</sup> According to this editorial, the U.S.S.R. was motivated to support actively Vietnam because of its perception that China was trying to break out of the encirclement imposed by the Soviet Union and was attempting an encirclement strategy of its own against Soviet interests in Europe and in Asia.<sup>40</sup> Peking's purpose in the short run was to draw Soviet forces away from the Sino-Soviet border; in the long run it hoped to create a suitable alliance to counter Soviet's alleged "hegemony", the editorial said. Gaining Vietnam as an overt ally would allow the U.S.S.R. to thwart China's purposes.

In August the Russians again brought up the matter of an Asian collective security pact that, if accepted, would allow the U.S.S.R. to obtain a foothold in the region. Brezhnev had first proposed the pact in 1969 at the height



of Sino-Soviet tension; the aim of which was the "renunciation of the use of force between states, respect of sovereignty, inviolability of frontiers, non-interference in other countries internal affairs and development of economic and other cooperation."<sup>41</sup> The Soviets then and later said China could adhere to the pact thus avoiding the allegation that the pact was an anti-Chinese instrument. The U.S.S.R. was well aware of the fact that China would not affix its signature to any agreement that would mean the renunciation of its territorial claims along the Sino-Soviet border or elsewhere. The Asian Collective Security Pact never had much chance in being accepted as other Asian states had claims against their neighbors that were unlikely to be dropped, and no Asian state wanted to alienate China.

"The Russians again brought up the subject especially to counter China's initiatives for Southeast Asian nations to join with it in an alliance against Vietnamese (or Soviet) expansionism. The renewed proposal for the pact in August 1975 served as a subtle reminder that the U.S.S.R. could wreak havoc in Southeast Asia if it deemed necessary to do so. Thus, any alliance on the part of any Southeast Asian nation with China would be doomed to failure in the conceptual stage and as a result the neutrality of Southeast Asia between the U.S.S.R. and China would be ensured. As long as a neutralized ASEAN remained only an economic organization and did not evolve into a defensive association as well, and



as long as the U.S. refrained from involvement in the region, Vietnam could act the role of the "Cuba of the East" unimpeded.

The U.S.S.R., meanwhile, used Vietnam to exert pressure in achieving the total removal of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia. Laotian actions against Thailand were much larger than just promoting Vietnamese interests as the strategy emanated from the Soviet Union.

The Soviets began, in a heavy-handed fashion, a similar strategy of neutralizing Japan. Because Vietnam was not in the position to militarily threaten Japan, the Soviet Union had to rattle its own sabres, threatening Japan with dire consequences if Japan signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation of quasi-alliance with China. Though Russia could have easily brought Japan over to its side by returning islands which had been captured during the Second World War, it believed that the mere threat of the use of force would be enough to keep Japan in line. Thus, beginning in 1975, Russia started exercises in the East China Sea and began building up its Pacific Fleet. These exercises went so far as to conduct a marine and airborne invasion on one of the Kurile Islands in its possession; Japan duly took note of the incident realizing the similarities of land features in that island with that of Japan proper.<sup>42</sup>

The Soviet tactics caused an up-welling of anti-Soviet of public opinion in Japan, leading eventually to the very



kind of Sino-Japanese treaty which the Soviets had tried to avoid. Vietnam could not have been too pleased with the counter productive results of the Russian initiatives in Japan because of their specific consequences to Vietnam. Japan was less eager to aid Vietnam or to give any kind of support to Vietnam in the Sino-Vietnam controversy because of Japan's perception of the obvious U.S.S.R.-Vietnam connection.

The ultimate aim of encirclement was to isolate China forcing it, in a state of weakness, to submit to Soviet leadership. If Soviet tactics worked adequately, force may not even have to be used as the threat of overwhelming destruction would cause capitulation. Delivering Southeast Asia to Vietnam's hands as payment for its efforts would be a small price to pay if Russia and Vietnam together were to be able to eliminate any effective Chinese challenge to their joint leadership in East Asia. Nothing came of the August efforts of the Soviets to forward the long-range Brezhnev objective of an Asian security pact.

Le Duan succeeded in getting two long-term agreements from Moscow in late October in exchange for something it was unwilling to grant to Peking--complete political agreement. In a 16-page political declaration, both sides said they "held completely identical views," with Hanoi announcing its support for the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, particularly detente. Vietnam affirmed its support for the Communists in Portugal and acknowledged agreement with







Soviet policies in support of India against Pakistan; both of these policies along with detente were not supported by China.<sup>43</sup>

Cambodia was the first to bear the brunt of the U.S.S.R.-Vietnam understanding first in the form of coup attempts, then by the use of Vietnamese troops after pro-Chinese forces in Cambodia had been successfully overcome.

In summary, events during the first ten months of 1975 brought about a new alignment of power in which the U.S.S.R. was striving for a neutral Southeast Asia and Japan to achieve its divide and conquer strategy, while the Chinese perceived strong alliances as the only means to keep the Soviets at bay. What finally evolved was a tenuous neutrality in Southeast Asia where neither China or the Soviet Union gained a decisive upper hand.

#### D. THE S.R.V. AND THE U.S. PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

While pursuing policies in 1975 which led to increasing estrangement with China and growing rapport with the U.S.S.R., the S.R.V. made a slow beginning in attempts to limit or eliminate the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia.

Though China saw the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia as necessary to keep the Soviets at bay, the states in that region, other than Vietnam, began to see association with the U.S. as a debit rather than an asset. The Indo-China debacle badly damaged faith in America's military strength



and its worth as an ally. There was concern, magnified by Vietnamese policies, that alignment with the U.S. would result in subversion or open conflict against their ruling governments. Therefore, at the May meeting of ASEAN in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia espoused non-alignment and neutrality as the byline for future foreign policy initiatives. ASEAN's "Peace Zone" was aimed at the eventual elimination of foreign bases and the prohibition of defense pacts with outside powers.<sup>44</sup> The May meeting ruled out acceptance of the Soviet proposal for an Asian Collective Security Pact. In accordance with the new philosophy, the Philippines and Thailand called for the disestablishment of Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO).<sup>45</sup>

Hanoi took advantage of the situation by demanding Thailand and the Philippines, as hosts for American bases and calling upon all the members of ASEAN to reject an American military involvement. The S.R.V. called upon all its neighbors to return all the weapons and supplies that had been taken out of Vietnam by fleeing refugees.

While this situation was developing, China changed its stance toward the American presence. China saw the U.S. in strategic retreat and no longer feared an American attack on the Chinese mainland. The U.S.S.R. becomes China's Enemy No. 1, so China wanted to keep the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia to offset the growing Russian influence. China admonished the Southeast Asian nations, including the



S.R.V. not to let "the lion come in from the back door  
while the wolf left by the front gate."



#### IV. THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF THE CAMBODIAN ISSUE

By the end of 1975 it was apparent that relations with Cambodia would constitute the key element in the evolution of the foreign policy of the S.R.V. Likewise Cambodia became the major factor in the larger picture of Chinese-Russian relations.

An independent Cambodia, as envisioned by China, was perceived as an obstacle for both the U.S.S.R. and Vietnam who aimed for the encirclement of China and leadership in a regional domain, respectively. Cambodia's rejection of Vietnamese demands on Cambodia signaled its unwillingness to adhere to a relationship granting Vietnam a dominant position in its internal affairs as Vietnam had in Laos. This meant further relations between Cambodia and Vietnam would be based on confrontation. Furthermore, historical animosities made post-war cooperation between the two countries highly unlikely.

This chapter will trace the centuries-long historical disputes between the two countries and present a detailed analysis of the immediate background of the conflict which broke out in open hostilities in the latter part of 1975.

##### A. HISTORICAL ANTAGONISM BETWEEN CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM

Pol Pot's apprehensions about Vietnamese presence on Cambodian soil was understandable in light of historical





Vietnamese transgressions on Khmer territory. In the early part of the 17th Century the Vietnamese began their first encroachments upon the Mekong Delta. Since that time, the mere survival of Cambodia has been in question as the Thais to the west and the Vietnamese to the east took every opportunity to nibble away territory. Early in the 19th Century Thailand held suzerainty over the westernmost provinces of Cambodia, i.e., Battambang and Siem Reap, while the Mekong area near Saigon (once Prey Nokor) was absorbed by the Vietnamese.

In the 1830's the Vietnamese placed a figurehead queen on the throne and from that moment on the modern Cambodian antipathy for the Vietnamese was born. The Vietnamese began a program of "Vietnamization" where every level from the administration of the country to the clothes of the officials were patterned after Vietnam. Even the Theravada Buddhist Church came under attack as the Vietnamese professed the Mahayana branch of Buddhism. Everything Khmer, including the darker color of the peoples skins, were looked down upon by their Vietnamese overlords.

The proud Cambodians who constructed the temples of Angkor Wat rose in rebellion in the mid-1840's with Thai help and ejected the Vietnamese. The cultural shocks imposed upon the Cambodians were to be transmitted to each succeeding generation in the form of hatred for the yuen (a term for the Vietnamese signifying barbarian). Although



Cambodia became a vassal to the Thais who perceived the value of having a buffer state against an expansionist Vietnam, the Thais never attempted a cultural conquest of the Khmers. The rule of the country remained in the hands of the Khmer ruling class and the cultural similarities between the two peoples far outweighed the dissimilarities.

The French establishment of a protectorate in 1864 displaced Thai suzerainty prevented further Vietnamese intrusions for the next 90 years. Still, the French aggravated anti-Vietnamese sentiment in the country as the French promoted Vietnamese immigration with the idea that the more energetic Vietnamese race would displace the Khmers, thereby encouraging economic advancement in Cambodia. The Vietnamese provided most of the labor in the French rubber plantations and much of the administrative staff in addition to large numbers in other fields.

Under the French the Vietnamese comprised 50 percent of Phnom Penh's population which was further divided into 25 percent Chinese and the remainder native Khmers. The Khmers questioned the loyalty of the Vietnamese emigres as they refused to learn the language and were totally unassimilable. Cambodian (Khmer) nationalists always feared that Vietnamese as adjuncts to French colonialism, who someday might become imperialists on their own account, seeking Vietnamese hegemony over the weaker but strongly independence-minded Cambodians.



## B. KHMER-VIETNAMESE ANTAGONISMS, 1954-1975

The modern period of Khmer-Vietnamese antagonism began with the Geneva accords of 1954. As part of the settlement Prince Sihanouk was permitted to incorporate the Khmer Rouge (Cambodian communists) into his Royal Cambodian army. The Khmer Rouge would have preferred their own autonomous territorial sector as the Communists in Laos (the Pathet Lao) were granted.<sup>1</sup> The Khmer Rouge, under their best known leader, Pol Pot, felt that his cause was betrayed and that the revolutionary struggle "dissolved into thin air through the Geneva agreement."<sup>2</sup> Throughout the 1950's and the early 1960's, the Communist movements in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were largely forced to go their separate ways.

A critical period for the Khmer Rouge-North Vietnamese relations was in the mid-1960's when Hanoi's actions appeared more supportive of the anti-communist Sihanouk regime than of the Communist Khmer Rouge. At that time, Sihanouk instituted a crackdown on the resurgent Cambodian communists, forcing them to scatter once again. Hanoi viewed the process with passive acquiescence while it proceeded to improve relations with the Sihanouk regime. By 1965 the North Vietnamese were using sanctuaries in the Parrot's Beak region of eastern Cambodia and the port of Sihanoukville (now Kompong Som) for the transport of arms reportedly with Sihanouk's permission.<sup>3</sup> This would have legitimized a procedure that had been going on for several years.



South Vietnamese officials estimated that two-thirds of Communist-block shipments for the support of the Hanoi-led National Liberation Front (NLF) over the years 1961-1964 were transported through Sihanoukville via Phnom Penh and the Mekong.<sup>4</sup> Hanoi's subsequent actions indicate that the Prince's granting of sanctuaries to the North Vietnamese was contingent upon Vietnam's bridling the activities of the Khmer Rouge.

According to a Khmer Rouge account, the break between the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge occurred in 1965 when the NLF tried to dissuade the Cambodians from acting against the Sihanouk regime.<sup>5</sup> North Vietnam further attempted to persuade the Khmer Rouge of the efficacy of the "Vietnam First" policy in which the aims of all three Indo-Chinese states, as envisioned by Hanoi, would be more quickly fulfilled by winning the war in Vietnam first; after that revolution could be advanced in Laos and in Cambodia.<sup>6</sup> The Khmer Rouge say that in 1967 and again in 1969 the Vietnamese, who were afraid of jeopardizing their Cambodian sanctuaries, tried to pressure the Khmer Rouge into accepting this policy. On the latter occasion, Hanoi reportedly tried to intimidate the Pol Pot forces into acquiescence but failed.<sup>7</sup> The Khmer Rouge saw Vietnam's motives as being purely selfish--as they had been in 1954--and rejected Hanoi's demands for joint action against the Americans and the South Vietnamese up until Sihanouk's ouster from power by Lon Nol in March 1970.







Following Lon Nol's ascendance, a new era in "cooperation" began between the Khmer Rouge and the NLF. The old relationship that had existed between Sihanouk and Hanoi was no longer possible with the Lon Nol regime. Inflammatory statements by the new government declaring that all Vietnamese were Viet Cong resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Vietnamese residents in Cambodia. The new regime, fearing that Hanoi intended to annex portions of Cambodia, repudiated Sihanouk's policy of granting sanctuaries to the North Vietnamese thereby removing any inhibition the Vietnamese may have had for attacking it.<sup>8</sup> From then on it was to Vietnam's advantage to encourage Khmer Rouge activities against the Phnom Penh regime. Hanoi willingly trained Khmer Rouge for the purpose of making the Ho Chi Minh Trail secure and to insure that its sanctuaries remained intact.

At best, the association between the Khmer Rouge and the North Vietnamese over the next two years was a "marriage of convenience." The Khmer Rouge, however, wanted to achieve some assurance of Hanoi's support in exchange for its providing security for Hanoi's western flank. Accordingly, when the three Indo-Chinese Communist parties met in Canton on 24-25 April 1970, it received Vietnam's pledge in a treaty to continue the fight against imperialism until victory was attained in all three Indo-Chinese countries.<sup>9</sup> The Khmer Rouge hoped that a written agreement would insure



that Hanoi would never again negotiate a settlement betraying Khmer interests.

Problems between the comrades-in-arms rose immediately after their "alliance" in 1970. The Khmer Rouge leadership, to the intense irritation of the North Vietnamese, strongly opposed integration between the two Communist organizations fearing Hanoi would try to undermine the independence of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the Cambodians refused to allow Hanoi to engage in political organizational activities on Cambodian soil involving Khmers or Vietnamese residents. Tensions were evident over trivial matters such as the prominence in which Ho Chi Minh's portrait was displayed. On at least one occasion, in September 1970, open conflict erupted when the Khmer Rouge fired from behind on Vietnamese with whom they were fighting in a joint operation.<sup>11</sup>

In Hanoi's view, Pol Pot was the instigator behind the Khmer Rouge stance of independence from North Vietnam. As early as 1953, Pol Pot (then Saloth Sar) and other Paris-trained intellectuals returned to Cambodia where they initiated an opposing faction to the pro-Hanoi Communists who were then in charge. Pol Pot achieved leadership after Touch Samut died of mysterious causes, marking the end of the pro-Vietnam line.<sup>12</sup> The first test for the new leadership was in 1965 when, as has already been mentioned, the Khmer Rouge decided to go against Hanoi to advance its own revolution.<sup>13</sup>



Unfriendly relations between the Pol Pot-led Khmer Rouge and Hanoi possibly induced Hanoi to back Sihanouk for leadership in a united front against Lon Nol. Pham Van Dong himself in April 1970 went to China to convince the Chinese that Sihanouk was the only one capable of gaining broad-based support to permit the eventual success of the revolution in Cambodia. At the same time, Pham Hung was sent to persuade Pol Pot of the tactical advantages that could be derived from this association. Neither China nor the Khmer Rouge was enthusiastic about placing Sihanouk in a position of authority as his anti-Khmer Rouge stance was bitterly remembered.<sup>14</sup> The Khmer Rouge were also wary of the fact that Sihanouk and the Vietnamese had developed a *modus vivendi* through years of cooperation. Notably, Sihanouk had convened a conference including the NLF and Hanoi in March 1965 to find a formula for some sort of federation of Indo-Chinese peoples.<sup>15</sup> Though Sihanouk was accepted in April 1970 as the symbolic head of forces against the Lon Nol regime, he was placed under close surveillance in an effort to prevent the opportunistic prince from concretizing his association with North Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge were aware that Sihanouk was like a two-edged sword; his popularity could be either used for or against them.

Subsequent to Sihanouk's appointment, Hanoi tried to reassert control over the Khmer Rouge but to Hanoi's chagrin, the same faction that managed to survive the Sihanouk-led





anti-communist campaign in the 1960's again demonstrated its resiliency by maintaining control over the Khmer Rouge.<sup>16</sup>

After all else had failed, the next logical step was for North Vietnam to try to assassinate the recalcitrant Pol Pot. According to a Khmer Rouge account, assassination was indeed attempted in November 1970 when Pol Pot and Nuon Chea were targets of an unsuccessful poisoning plot while they were visiting in Hanoi.<sup>17</sup>

The next critical stage in relations between the two Communist parties came in 1972 when the U.S. and North Vietnam began formal negotiations to end the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup> At that time Kissinger was in China while President Podgorny of the U.S.S.R. was in Hanoi attempting to work out the details for a final settlement. Subsequent secret negotiations in early 1973 between North Vietnam and the U.S. reportedly achieved Vietnamese acceptance to pull out of Cambodia with the end of the war in Vietnam. Hanoi was given financial inducements to adhere to the agreements in the form of massive reconstruction aid.<sup>19</sup> North Vietnam tried to gain the Khmer Rouge's acceptance of a negotiated settlement with the Lon Nol regime for the aim of setting up a coalition government in Cambodia. However, the Khmer Rouge were optimistic of achieving imminent victory and were unwilling to postpone indefinitely their final success. Hanoi and the U.S. signed the Paris Peace accords in April 1973. Once again the Khmer Rouge had been betrayed by





Vietnam who had just three years earlier piously pledged to fight to the end.<sup>20</sup>

Actual fighting between the NLF and the Khmer Rouge broke out in 1972 and continued all the while the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge forces struggled to take over Phnom Penh. Although the NLF and the Khmer Rouge were ostensibly united in victory over the Americans and the South Vietnamese, the NLF was not happy to see the Pol Pot-led Khmer Rouge faction take over Phnom Penh. The NLF slowed, then discontinued transporting vital supplies to Pol Pot. This lack of support proved key in two military engagements against Phnom Penh in April 1973 and in January 1972. These abortive battles resulted in the deaths of more than one-third of Pol Pot's entire army and left the Khmer Rouge to suffer alone during the frightful raids of the American B-52's on the Cambodian capitol.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps not coincidentally, Vietnamese logistics support to Cambodia ended after an early Summer 1973 meeting in Moscow between Pham Van Dong and Le Duan representing Vietnam and Secretary Brezhnev of the U.S.S.R. A July 1973 FEER report claims that Brezhnev told the Vietnamese leaders that he approved of Hanoi's discontinuing assistance to the Khmer Rouge.<sup>22</sup> Sihanouk, lamenting the situation, in September 1973 complained that "North Vietnam has withdrawn its caches of arms from Cambodia to South Vietnam, so we no longer have access to them."<sup>23</sup> The Khmer reaction must have been disbelief and perhaps even bitterness.



In the extensive NLF-Khmer Rouge hostilities in 1973, refugee reports indicate that hundreds from both sides were killed in an area of eastern Cambodia where the Vietnamese retained sanctuaries. The fighting was so intense that it disrupted North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam and reduced the number of attacks on government outposts in the month of July. One refugee reported that a new group of Khmer Rouge soldiers entered the region prior to the outbreak of fighting and demanded the swift evacuation of Vietnamese troops in the region.<sup>24</sup> The influx of trusted Khmer cadres to implement the new Cambodian line--probably promulgated during a Summer 1973 session of the Khmer Rouge National Congress--signified that the Khmers were worried about Vietnamese influence in the area and within Khmer forces. After the eruption of hostilities, which in one case began with a Khmer Rouge attempt to intercept scarce rice supplies, Khmer cadres urged the people to rise up to oust the Vietnamese who had come "to live in our country like parasites." The Khmer Rouge claimed that the Vietnamese "would eventually eat up all our rice without doing any good for Cambodia." Another prevalent theme was that the Vietnamese were occupying territory that it did not plan to leave.<sup>25</sup>

The Khmer Rouge's eventual success over the remnant pro-American Lon Nol forces was not due to North Vietnamese aid as is sometimes asserted but to Chinese support that was accelerated in the Summer of 1974. Shawcross speculates



that the U.S.'s unwillingness to negotiate with Sihanouk brought the Chinese to accept the military solution.<sup>26</sup> This was during the general decline in relations between Vietnam and China as described above. China's active support for Cambodia may have marked both a decision by China to support the Pol Pot regime against Vietnamese-led factions and the beginnings of Chinese suspicion of Hanoi's ties with the U.S.S.R. In early 1975 the Khmer Rouge once again found itself outside the gates of Phnom Penh and again there was a battlefield lull; this time, however, the story would have a different ending. While the North Vietnamese were gearing up its Soviet-planned invasion against South Vietnam, Ieng Sary in early March ventured to Peking where he obtained the necessary arms to breach the defenses of Phnom Penh.<sup>27</sup> The capital fell on 17 April 1975 and with it Hanoi's ability to gain Khmer Rouge acceptance of an Indo-Chinese Federation by peaceful means. Hanoi missed its opportunity of gaining influence over Cambodia by its failure to provide military aid at critical junctures. After April 1975 China gained ascendance as the benefactor for Cambodia.

Indicating the new close association with Peking, the victory statements made by the new regime were effusive in their praise for China declaring, "The victory of the Cambodian people is the same as the victory of the Chinese." North Korea and North Vietnam were thanked for their support



but the U.S.S.R. was slighted in public statements, and its offices in Phnom Penh were ransacked. The Soviets paid for their lack of political and economic support (evident in its non-recognition of the Khmer Rouge until the last moment) by finding its officials along with most other countries' representatives, ejected from Cambodia.<sup>28</sup> The Cambodians also made it clear that they did their own fighting to achieve victory. Chau Sang, a special representative of Sihanouk said that press reports in 1970, 1971, and 1973 claiming that North Vietnamese troops fought with the Khmer Rouge were erroneous. He stated that at no time did the North Vietnamese fulfill a combatant role.<sup>29</sup> When the Vietnamese fought in Cambodia, it was for their own parochial needs, i.e., securing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and not for achieving Khmer Rouge victory. The Khmer Rouge later claimed that it was they who helped the Vietnamese to victory and not the other way around.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, they provided security for the Ho Chi Minh Trail and Cambodians trained by the Vietnamese fought in the final campaigns in South Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge also helped to procure rice for the Vietnamese; Ieng Sary reportedly lived clandestinely in Phnom Penh in 1968-1970 for that purpose.<sup>31</sup> Even the rapid increase in Khmer Rouge forces from a mere few thousand to over 50,000 from 1970 cannot be attributed entirely to Vietnamese recruiting and training efforts. Already in 1968 the Khmer Rouge had developed a viable







guerrilla force of its own. American bombing of Cambodia in 1970 caused an extensive backlash against the Lon Nol regime and a concomitant increase in the numbers within the Khmer Rouge ranks.

In summary, the relations between the Cambodian Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese NLF before April, 1975, were not conducive for post-war cooperation between the communist countries. The "special relationship" that Hanoi professed to have existed during that time period was more a product of wishful thinking rather than the actual state of affairs. Instead of the benevolent ally that it tried to paint itself, Hanoi was untrustworthy and selfish in its relations with the Khmer Rouge. Historical fears resulting from over two and one-half centuries of Vietnamese expansionism at the expense of Cambodia and the Khmer people dictated Khmer Rouge resistance to Hanoi's efforts to place Cambodia in a subordinate status and its intransigence against Vietnamese territorial demands. Vietnam's continuing occupation of border areas in Cambodia generated the suspicion that Hanoi's leaders would follow in the steps of its predecessors to incorporate Cambodian territory into Vietnam.

### C. VIETNAMESE-CAMBODIAN RELATIONS, 1975-1977

After April 1975 sovereignty, defined by Webster's New World Dictionary as "supreme and independent political authority" was the main issue dividing Cambodia and Vietnam. Cambodia declared that its relations with any country would



be based on equality and independence and rejected a subordinate status in any proposed Hanoi-led Indo-Chinese Federation. Historical factors militated against any association that would undermine Khmer national identity. Vietnam, on the other hand, insisted that the two countries shared a "special relationship" and therefore rejected Cambodia's stance of independence and hence its right of sovereignty.

It is a logical assumption that Hanoi's pre-1975 efforts to undermine the Pol Pot leadership which adamantly refused to become an integral part of the Vietnamese empire continued during the 1975-1977 time frame when a series of attempted coups and revolts wracked Cambodia. Hanoi's actions against Phnom Penh were necessarily on a limited scale short of total war because Vietnam had to first consider the consolidation of the two halves of Vietnam. Hanoi could not subjugate Cambodia until its own internal opposition was sufficiently quelled. Vietnam moved rapidly in 1976 towards consolidation, and by early 1977 its internal problems were sufficiently under control to permit military action against Cambodia. Border conflicts that continuously plagued the two countries would then, in April 1977, become the excuse for Vietnamese "retaliation." As could be expected, both China and the Soviet Union had parts to play in the determination of Cambodia's fate.



Several events beginning in September 1975 pointed ominously to a Vietnamese incursion against Cambodia later that year. Concomitantly, Thailand became the focus of respective Chinese and Vietnamese diplomatic and coercive efforts.

Tenuous evidence suggests the fate of Cambodia was discussed during Le Duan's visit to Peking in September 1975. Coincident with his arrival was a propitious message by Laos--significantly the first of its kind--tracing the birth of the Laotian Com-unist Party to 1955 when, Laos said the party was created in the "spirit of an Indo-Chinese Federation."<sup>32</sup> Vietnam had failed in its use of coercion against Cambodia and was perhaps attempting to win, with Laotian support, China's acceptance for such an association through negotiation. If this hypothesis is correct, the threat of Vietnam's joining the Soviet camp could have formed the basis for negotiation with China to achieve a Federation of Indo-Chinese states. That type of bargaining, however, would not have had much impact on the Chinese who by that time concluded Vietnam had joined in an alliance with the Soviets.

As if to confirm speculation that Cambodia's fate was in the balance, Sihanouk on October 6 in a United Nations address reaffirmed Cambodia's stance that it was a neutral and independent country and intended to remain so. He announced that Cambodia would not join any organization



other than the United Nations and the non-aligned. Significantly, Sihanouk's statement precluded Cambodia's membership in an Indo-Chinese Federation, a fact Hanoi probably noted with irritation. Sihanouk also declared that Cambodia "does reserve its right to defend itself from force of arms if it is the victim of attack or aggression."<sup>33</sup> Although Cambodia was to have problems with Thailand in the future, it is noteworthy that relations with that country at this time were on the upswing, culminating in normalization of relations on October 31. The aggression Sihanouk was referring to, therefore, was from another quarter.

Cambodia may have had its last chance to form a closer association with Laos and Vietnam in mid-October when a conference of the three Indo-Chinese states was held in Laos. It may have been coincidental, but following this meeting Thai-Laotian border problems significantly escalated and Hanoi appeared to be making preparations for battle with Cambodia.

Refugee reports in mid-October ominously indicated a buildup of Vietnamese forces along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Possibly as a guise for future action Hanoi broadcasts began to harrangue against members of the former Saigon regime which continued to resist communist rule.<sup>34</sup> Some of these anti-Hanoi forces were known to operate along the border with Cambodia thus affording North Vietnam a convenient excuse for mobilizing forces in the region.<sup>35</sup>







Various considerations made the end of 1975 a logical time for Vietnam to engage in an incursion against Cambodia. The break with China in September undermined the remaining pro-Peking forces within the Vietnamese communist party thereby reducing the influence of those within Vietnam who would urge moderation in Vietnam's dealings with China and its allies.

A second factor was that Pol Pot had not consolidated his position throughout the country and pro-Vietnamese cadres remained in sufficient number to lead a viable revolt of the disgruntled segments of the population. As late as 1978, Pol Pot declared that one percent of the Cambodian population, or 40,000 to 60,000 persons based on a population of 4-6 million persons were anti-regime elements (down from between one to two percent in 1977).<sup>34</sup> Undoubtedly the percentage of disaffected Cambodians was much higher in 1975 when there were numerous Lon Nol sympathizers extant in the country. Vietnam need only to keep its part in the matter secret and it could utilize the anti-communist remnants in Cambodia as well as the pro-Vietnamese cadres. Despite the favorable climate, the anti-Pol Pot revolt never got off the ground possible because of the alliance structure the Chinese were able to build for the Cambodians and Vietnam's inability to play a decisive role.

Vietnam endeavored unsuccessfully to intimidate Thailand through Laos. Thailand has historically sought to have



Cambodia as a buffer state against Vietnamese expansionism. The Vietnamese realized this proclivity and attempted to prevent the natural alignment between Cambodia and Thailand by intimidation and by focusing Thai attention on difficulties along the Thai-Laotian border. To Vietnam's advantage practically every attempt by Cambodia to improve relations with Thailand was marred by simultaneous border conflicts which had the effect of deterring a mutual understanding between the two countries. Although the source of these conflicts has not been positively determined, Thailand strongly suspected the Vietnamese.

The closeness of the Vietnamese-Laotian association makes it logical for one to assume Vietnam was also behind the Thai-Laotian border conflicts. Vientiane's hearty support for an Indo-Chinese Federation has already been referred to. Laos also echoed Vietnam's demands for reparations and supported Hanoi's attempts to eliminate U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. The personal tie cannot be overemphasized as much of Vientiane's leadership was educated in Hanoi and many Pathet Lao leaders had Vietnamese wives.<sup>37</sup> The extent of Vietnam's influence over Laos is indicated in the suggestion that the policy of Laos was being made by an Indochinese Communist Party (dominated by Vietnam) for Laotians to implement.<sup>38</sup> If true, it would be extremely unlikely that Laos would instigate problems with Thailand without Hanoi's blessing. Similarly, it would be difficult



to reject Soviet complicity in the Thai-Laotian border problems as the Laos government openly confessed its belief that the U.S.S.R. was the "correct leadership" for world communism.<sup>39</sup> Since Laos ascribed to the leadership of Hanoi and Moscow, it is agreeable that all three communist elements were not averse to the continuation of the embarrassing border conflicts between Laos and Thailand.

Skirmishes along the Thai-Laotian border evident throughout the summer of 1975 rose in intensity immediately following the mid-October meeting of the Indo-Chinese states. Every attempt by Thailand to ameliorate the situation was rebuffed, including proposals to redefine the borders, requests for negotiations on outstanding issues, and assurances by Thailand that it wanted to be a good neighbor.<sup>40</sup> No response was likely as tensions were contrived by the Pathet Lao who endeavored to inflame ancient animosities by referring to an emerald buddha that the Thais absconded from a Lao temple in 1778 and fourteen Laotian provinces which were incorporated into Thai territory that same year.<sup>41</sup>

On 17 November the border problems reached a climax when a Thai gunboat was sunk and the Thais retaliated with bombing raids. Prime Minister Kukrit, who steadfastly tried to improve relations with all communist countries in the region accused a third country, meaning Hanoi, of inciting border clashes and closed the border between Laos



and Thailand.<sup>42</sup> The Thai ambassador to Vietnam was subsequently recalled and repercussions were felt by Vietnamese residents in Thailand in the form of anti-Vietnamese rioting in Nong Khai, a town in the area where the incidents occurred.<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister Kukrit accused Hanoi of violating its pledge not to interfere in Thailand's internal affairs by its vociferous and repeated declarations in support of Laos.<sup>44</sup>

The closure of the border created havoc on the Laotian economy which relied heavily on the Thais for the transport of vital commodities. Consequently an economic mission from Vientiane to Hanoi requested emergency aid which resulted in a Soviet-Vietnamese airlift of necessities. By late December Laos was feeling the severity of the effects from the blockade and asked foreign missions in Vientiane to help persuade Bangkok to resume traffic in Laos.<sup>45</sup> On January 1, 1976 Thailand lifted the blockade with Laos as a New Year's Day gift and a gesture for improved relations.<sup>46</sup>

Vietnam's strategy behind the Thai-Laotian border problems backfired as it forced the Vietnamese rather than the Thais to focus attention on Laos. The strategy also failed to dissuade Thailand from consolidating its ties with Cambodia and China.

In the midst of the Thai-Laotian border disputes Thailand, with Chinese help, was improving its relations with Cambodia. This, of course, was just what the Vietnamese







were trying to avert. On October 20 a Chinese delegation arrived in Bangkok probably to arrange normalization of relations between Cambodia and Thailand and to brief the Thais on the state of relations between China and Vietnam as well as between China and Cambodia. Illustrating China's involvement, Ieng Sary representing Cambodia arrived in Thailand on October 28 via a Chinese Boeing 707 which was dispatched especially for the purpose. The Soviets, who also wanted to prevent Thailand's entente with the Chinese and Cambodians, accused the Chinese of supporting the CPT and of proselytizing workers in Thai cities due to its failure to make advances in the countryside.<sup>47</sup> The Soviet Union was undoubtedly cognizant of the fact that Hanoi--not Peking--was responsible for the increased activity by urban insurgents and was obviously trying to deter closer Thai association with China and hence Cambodia, by accusing China of playing a two-faced game--pretending friendship with the Thai government while secretly supporting Thai insurgents. The Thais, however, refused to believe that the Chinese had anything to do with stirring up guerrilla activity and Kukrit made clear his conviction that it was Vietnam and not China which supported insurgents with arms and training.<sup>48</sup>

Thailand made a last attempt to show toleration towards Laos and its Vietnamese teacher by a long and rhetoric offer of friendship.<sup>49</sup> The Thai initiative was answered



by further hostilities along the Thai-Laos border. This rebuff spurred the Thais to improve relations with China and Cambodia and prompted Thais to seek a U.S. delay in its scheduled pullout from Thai bases, originally slated for Spring 1976.<sup>50</sup>

The Chinese, meanwhile, used the means at its disposal to deter Vietnamese expansionism. In addition to giving assistance to Cambodia, China also resurrected the Paracels/Spratlys issue to remind Vietnam that it had Peking's feelings to consider when Hanoi advanced its ties with the Soviet Union. During and after Le Duan's visit to Peking in September 1975, China firmed its claims to the Paracels, Pratas, Macclesfield Bank and the Spratlys in a most detailed manner.<sup>51</sup> Chinese naval exercises in the South China Sea during the Fall of 1975 and swift Chinese reactions to ships that wrecked on the Paracels in December illustrated that the Chinese navy could exert credible pressure against the Spratlys and the Vietnamese coast if the need arose.<sup>52</sup>

The Chinese strategy in using the Spratlys to deter Vietnamese expansion was in part blunted by the Soviets who wanted to make sure that the split between the Chinese and the Vietnamese would not be healed. On November 22 Pravda accused China of exhibiting its expansionist policies by claiming the Spratlys and Paracels which "the Vietnamese people consider their own territory."<sup>53</sup>



Presumably, by this time Soviet atlases had been changed to show Vietnamese rather than Chinese sovereignty over those islands. In response to Soviet goading, the Chinese said the U.S.S.R. was trying to "stir up" Vietnamese antagonism to China by backing the Vietnamese claim and reasserted its determination to recover the Spratlys which were part of China's "sacred territory."<sup>54</sup> Hanoi entered the verbal battles by asserting that the Vietnamese army was "ready to accept any mission anywhere," and to "go as far as the border areas and sea islands to maintain the security of the fatherland."<sup>55</sup>

The Soviets saw the opportunity to deepen the Sino-Vietnamese rift by declaring that the Chinese never were willing to see the reunification of Vietnam and cited Nguyen Cao Ky's claim that in 1972 he was offered financial aid by the Chinese to organize a coup d-etat in Saigon for neutralization of South Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> The U.S.S.R.'s emphasis on this point brought into sharp contrast the policies of China and the Soviet Union towards Vietnam. China, on the one hand, was perceived by Vietnam as doing everything in its power to prevent Vietnam's "manifest destiny" of winning ascendance in an Indo-Chinese Federation and in Southeast Asia, while the Soviets were not only backing up the Vietnamese in its claims for the Paracels and Spratlys, it was also supportive of Vietnam's aims throughout Southeast Asia.

The Soviet's support for Vietnam encouraged Hanoi's bellicosity towards Cambodia and China by removing much of the



moderating influence China might have had over Vietnam. Without Soviet support, Vietnam might have been more responsive to China's position in the Spratlys and more inclined to discuss with China the problem of Cambodia. Encouraged by Soviet support, Vietnam in early 1976 issued a new official map which included both the Paracels and the Spratlys.<sup>57</sup> In the same timeframe, Hanoi in all probability participated in an attempted coup in Cambodia aimed at eliminating a regime hostile to the Vietnamese. Despite the accelerating tensions with China, Vietnam showed that it had no intention to accede to China's wishes and abandon its goals in Indo-China.

Vietnam did try, however, to improve its relations with ASEAN, thereby neutralizing as far as possible local opposition to its possible expansionist schemes. Vietnam modified its earlier criticisms of ASEAN as a stage of U.S. imperialism and assured its neighbors that it would abandon its earlier support of guerrilla movements in the various countries. At least as a temporary expedient, Vietnam professed its acceptance of ASEAN's vision of Southeast Asia as a zone of "independence, peace and neutrality."<sup>58</sup>

On July 12 Hanoi established relations with the Philippines and immediately thereafter Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien began a goodwill tour of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesian. In a radical departure from its bitter denunciations of Thailand just a month before, Vietnam accepted an







invitation from Thailand to engage in talks aimed at normalization of relations.<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, Vietnam's move to improve relations with Thailand was followed by Laotian actions to do the same. On August 3 Thailand and Laos issued a joint communique aimed at resolving border disputes between the two countries.<sup>60</sup> Just three days later, on August 6, Thailand and Vietnam agreed to establish relations sometime in the near future.<sup>61</sup>

While Vietnam would occasionally lapse into caustic tirades against ASEAN in an attempt to sway the members at critical junctures, relations between ASEAN and Vietnam were, after July 1976, thanks to worsened Sino-Vietnamese relations, on a much more harmonious level than previously. Behind the facade of friendship, Vietnam continued to support guerrilla movements,<sup>62</sup> and assumed an open hostile stance toward Thailand when in October 1976 a strongly anti-communist military junta assumed power in Bangkok.

#### D. ATTEMPTED COUPS AND INVASION, 1976

With the passing months of 1976, the S.R.V. was no longer content with mere diplomatic maneuvers to isolate Cambodia or with military measures to strengthen its control over the disputed Cambodia-Vietnam border areas. The S.R.V. participated in periodic attempted coups and revolts throughout 1976 and 1977 which created massive disorder within Cambodia and contributed to the radicalization of Cambodia's internal and external policies. The resultant world antipathy toward



Cambodia facilitated Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia by allowing Hanoi to disguise its act of aggression as a humanitarian gesture to relieve the world of the barbaric Pol Pot regime.

The source of insurrections in Cambodia cannot be defensively determined although the pattern of Khmer Rouge-Vietnamese relations strongly implicates Hanoi. At various times the Cambodians accused the Khmer Serai (the remnants of the Lon Nol supporters), the CIA and Vietnam of instigating the upheavals. The degree of U.S. involvement cannot be ascertained, but it would seem illogical for either the CIA or the anti-communist Khmer Serai to engage in coup attempts to replace one communist regime with another. Unlike the Khmer Serai which was constrained by a lack of financial support, Vietnam not only had the motive but it had the means represented by pro-Hanoi communists that remained a viable presence in Cambodia. These pro-Hanoi communists took every advantage of factional struggles within the Cambodia communist party. The Vietnamese communists, supported by their Cambodia collaborators, accused Pol Pot of creating border tensions with the Vietnamese in order to outmaneuver his pro-Hanoi Cambodian opponents. Vietnam gave active support to indigenous forces within Cambodia in order to put a client regime in power in Phnom Penh.



According to refugees from Battambang and Oddar Meanchey provinces who were directly involved in anti-Pol Pot activities, pro-Hanoi anti-Pol Pot plotting was continuous from the time Pol Pot established himself in 1975.<sup>63</sup> Refugees fleeing Cambodia across the border to Vietnam were reportedly being welcomed with covering fire by Vietnamese border guards. Previous to that time it had been Vietnam's policy to turn back refugees.<sup>64</sup> Vietnam may have begun at that time to recruit refugees for use in a counter-insurgency force to fight within Cambodia. Refugees who showed a willingness to accept Vietnamese leadership were molded into Cambodian-Vietnamese units in preparation for coup-related action in Phnom Penh.<sup>65</sup> Anti-regime elements were operating along the entire length of Cambodia's borders, as well as in guerrilla units in Cambodia's interior.<sup>66</sup>

A Livre Noir account of attempted coups in Phnom Penh in early 1976 identified one leader as Cha Krey, an anti-Pol Pot commander of Khmer Rouge forces south of Prey Veng province, an area adjacent to Vietnam. Interestingly, this region of Cambodia was also the operating grounds of So Phim who in the latter half of 1978 led pro-Hanoi insurgents against the Pol Pot regime. Cha Krey's task was to assassinate the Khmer Rouge leadership while, in the midst of diversionary activity in the western province of Siem Reap, an invasion would be launched from outside the country.<sup>67</sup> The coup was reported, but it failed.



Sihanouk may have been one of the first to feel the repercussions of the attempted coup. On March 21 Sihanouk was unanimously elected to the Khmer National Assembly as a representative of Phnom Penh. On April 4, just two weeks after he assumed his posts, Sihanouk mysteriously resigned as head of state and began a hibernation that lasted until the end of 1977. Sihanouk's speedy departure may have been due to his lost support of his Chinese patrons, i.e., Chou En-lai who died earlier in the year and Teng Hsiao-ping who was on the verge of a forced political sabbatical; Teng was relieved of his duties on April 7 following early April riots in Peking.<sup>68</sup> Or, as seems more likely, he may have been removed because of his possible connection with anti-Pol Pot pro-Hanoi Cambodian plotters.

The possibility that Sihanouk aligned himself with Hanoi and pro-Hanoi communists cannot be discounted. The first part of Chapter IV discussed the special relationship that Sihanouk and Hanoi had developed during the Prince's tenure to 1970. If such an association had reemerged it could explain why the Khmer Rouge leadership was so averse to having Sihanouk go to Hanoi to discuss the fate of Cambodia in 1978-1979. They may have feared a Sihanouk sellout to Hanoi in order to return Sihanouk to power. Khmer Rouge elements who favored closer association with Hanoi, though probably having no special affection for the Vietnamese, may have viewed an Indo-Chinese Federation in partnership







with Vietnam as the only means to retain Khmer independence. A strong leader with popular support would be more likely to prevent the total subjugation of Cambodia while keeping the expansionist Vietnamese at bay; cooperation with Vietnam, therefore, may have been viewed as a necessary evil. Khmer Rouge refugees intimately involved in the anti-regime plotting offer some support for the view.

Following Sihanouk's removal from his posts and the concomitant purge of Khmer Rouge officials in April, Vietnam once again reversed its policies to the Cambodian refugees, this time forcing them to return to Cambodia.<sup>69</sup> This apparently conciliatory gesture may have been timed to take advantage of the unsettled political climates in both China and Cambodia. Vietnam may have hoped that it could exert more influence over the existing leadership in Cambodia who might have been more amenable to Vietnamese requests while China was immersed in its own affairs. Pro-Hanoi communists had reportedly made inroads into the ruling clique and many pro-Peking members were among those eliminated from power. Notably, So Phim who was to gain notoriety for leading pro-Hanoi communists in insurrection against Phnom Penh in 1978 assumed the position of Vice President at this time.<sup>70</sup>

Whatever Vietnam's reasons for its change in refugee policy, it was soon evident that the post-purge Cambodian leadership had not significantly changed its stance towards Vietnam. May 1976 border talks between the two countries



ended in failure as Cambodia refused to give up an inch of its territory to the Vietnamese. The Cambodians claimed that the Vietnamese had presented a map which, if accepted, would have allowed the Vietnamese to claim sovereignty over a large chunk of Cambodia's sea territory.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps because of Vietnam's failure in negotiations with Cambodia, Vietnam may have decided to place renewed emphasis on subversion to undermine the Pol Pot regime.

In May 1976, according to refugee reports, border patrols under renegade Khmer Rouge officers were instructed to ignore Phnom Penh's directives calling for more vigilance to prevent the enemy from entering Cambodian territory.<sup>72</sup> Due to the proximity in time between the failure of Vietnamese-Cambodian border talks and the new directives, Cambodia may have been referring to Vietnam or Hanoi's agents as the enemy to be looked for. Rebel leaders instructed the border patrols to disregard border occurrences and told them to quit planting punfi sticks and land mines which had the dual purpose of preventing refugees from departing and enemies from entering Cambodian territory.<sup>73</sup> Dismantled border defenses would allow both pro-Hanoi elements and Khmer Serai forces to enter Cambodian territory with impunity creating more havoc than their limited numbers would normally produce. Because anti-Pol Pot forces were known to operate from Thai territory, the increase in border activity would be blamed on the Thais, postponing an understanding between the two countries.



Events in the latter half of 1976 added to the momentum leading to the confrontation between Cambodia and Vietnam. In September 1976 Pol Pot reportedly got word of the plotting against his regime.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps as a result he disappeared for a period of time possibly to avoid assassination while he worked to determine who was behind the plots.<sup>75</sup> Besides having to contend with internal subversion, by late 1976 the Cambodian regime found itself surrounded on all sides by hostile elements. Unfortunately for Cambodia's world image, it began to act more and more like the embattled state that it was while Vietnam escaped any share of blame for Cambodia's tragedy. Much later Vietnam would be perceived as the victim of hostilities from China, a paranoic state, though in truth Cambodia was the victim of circumstances which in all probability were orchestrated by Hanoi.

Both Thailand and Laos hardened their positions towards Cambodia in the latter half of 1976. In October the fervently anti-communist General Thanin assumed power in a military coup d'etat following rioting at a Bangkok university. The Thais accused Vietnam of instigating the violence claiming that Vietnamese and Soviet articles were found on campus. Regardless, Thanin did much to undermine the policy of detente with communist states instituted by his predecessors. Border problems already destined to worsen due to the presence of rebel Khmer Rouge soldiers were bound to deteriorate with an intolerant regime in power in Thailand.



The downturn in Cambodian-Vietnamese relations was paralleled by increasing tensions between Laos and Cambodia. In the end of 1976 Laos stopped sending back refugees to Cambodia when, Laos claimed, it "realized that all returned refugees had been executed." Vietnam's periodic displays of "benevolence" in accepting refugees marked concomitant attempts by Hanoi to undermine the Cambodian regime. Perhaps Laos was employing similar tactics. Cambodia's reaction was to strengthen its borders by digging trenches and planting land mines while border guards took occasional shots to keep people away.<sup>76</sup>

Meanwhile Vietnam was moving rapidly to consolidate the socialist north with the capitalist south while pro-Chinese elements were isolated and eliminated from power. Elections were held in early April 1976 to unite the country as speedily as possible.<sup>77</sup> Subsequently, Hanoi increased its measures to ferret out the remaining pro-Saigon forces, warning members of the former regime that they would be exterminated if they continued to oppose Hanoi.<sup>78</sup>

In June 1976, when war between the S.R.V. and China was no longer viewed as being impossible, Le Duan declared that Vietnam would be more rapidly socialized. The stringent internal policies Vietnam instituted at this time contrasted markedly with Hanoi's move in July to improve relations with ASEAN.<sup>79</sup> It was the ethnic Chinese that bore the brunt of







the new Vietnamese policies. In August an economic decree was issued applying to all businesses that made over ten percent profit since the fall of Saigon. Profits were subject to an initial tax of 80 percent increasing to 100 percent retroactive to July. Though all businesses were affected, the Chinese were especially hurt and believed to be the targets of the new decree.<sup>80</sup>

When Mao Tse-tung died in September 1976, a temporary lull occurred in the stormy Sino-Vietnamese relations. Hua Kuo-feng personally requested assistance from the Vietnamese to help preserve the body.<sup>81</sup> In early December Vietnames Vice Premier Do Muoi received a cordial welcome in Peking, which was seen as indicative of a thaw in relations between China and Vietnam.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the temporarily improved climate between China and Vietnam, Vietnam eliminated eight pro-Chinese members from the party's central committee, including former ambassadors to China and members of ethnic groups having power bases in northern Vietnam along the Sino-Vietnamese border. Notably, Hoang Van Hoan, a former ambassador to Peking who gained fame for defecting from Vietnam in July 1979 and a vocal critic of Le Duan's pro-Soviet policies, was one of the casualties of the December purge.<sup>83</sup> This anti-Chinese behavior in the midst of a general improvement of Sino-Vietnamese relations evidences the ambivalence in the evolving policies of the S.R.V.



At this same time, early December 1976, Vietnam also moved to neutralize the pro-Chinese ethnic groups that lined the border with China and Vietnam. Autonomous zones were abolished and attempts were made to step up their integration into Vietnam both economically and politically.<sup>84</sup>

Ethnic Chinese left Vietnam in great numbers as discrimination intensified in the restricted zones along the Sino-Vietnamese border.<sup>85</sup>

In possible preparation for a military campaign, General Giap visited the Soviet Union in March 1977. Though reportedly on an economic mission, Giap obtained Marshal Ustinov's pledge to help "the Vietnam People's Army strengthen its combat capacity." The Soviet Union's Army Chief of Staff also averred that "active and unified action of the socialist countries is very important and necessary" to counter "imperialist action."<sup>86</sup> Although this statement pointed towards a partnership between the two countries, Giap did not see Secretary Brezhnev, President Podgorny or Premier Kosygin during his visit to the Soviet Union.<sup>87</sup> It is possible the Soviet leadership did not want to associate itself publicly with actions the Vietnamese might take against Cambodia.

Another development in April 1977 sent off signals of a possible Vietnamese aggressive action. A report originating from the State Department and the Pentagon indicated that Vietnam had decided against selling weapons captured



weapons captured after the fall of Saigon. Reportedly, Vietnam also declined to provide weaponry to insurgency movements in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.<sup>88</sup> This decision against the sale of weapons to Asian and African governments may have reflected two considerations: first, to influence opinion in the U.S. for normal U.S.-S.R.V. relations and second, to maintain maximum military capability for itself.

Vietnamese-U.S. relations underwent a marked improvement during the early months of the Carter Administration. The timing of the Washington disclosure mentioned above, just a few days prior to the May 3rd opening of talks between the U.S. and Vietnam in Paris, may have been an effort to improve the climate for negotiations. Possibly in reciprocation for Vietnam's concessions on arms sales and its announced decision to make more vigorous efforts to determine the fate of Americans missing in action in Vietnam, the U.S. on May 4th agreed not to block Vietnam's admission into the United Nations. In early May Vietnam began to prepare its people for apparently imminent normalization of relations with the U.S.<sup>89</sup>

#### E. S.R.V.-CAMBODIAN HOSTILITIES, 1977

All the diplomatic maneuvers of the S.R.V. and the secret meddling in the internal affairs of Cambodia may well have been a diplomatic prelude to the invasion which later occurred. The timing was at least partially determined



by the growing crises in Phnom Penh. On January 20, 1977, one phase of the plot against the Pol Pot regime which had been germinating since late 1975 was scheduled to be launched. According to a FEER report, "the plan was to recruit as many soldiers and civilians as possible in the provinces along with Battambang and Oddar Meanchey provinces which had already been infiltrated by insurgents spanned the breadth of Cambodia. The extent of this insurgency could be seen by the fact that in Oddar Meanchey province alone thirty-five chiefs of villages, communes and districts met to plan the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime. The plot was foiled, however, when a messenger between rebel forces in Kompong Thom and Kompong Cham provinces was intercepted on 17 January. Subsequently all persons in leadership positions in the northern provinces of Cambodia were removed from their positions. Hu Nim, the Khmer Rouge Information Minister named by some refugees as the leader of the insurgency, disappeared from public view in January 1977.<sup>91</sup>

The Khmer Rouge, thinking the Thais were at least partially behind the plots, launched a punitive incursion into Thai territory. Three Thai villages were attacked and 30 villagers were killed in a battle which began on January 28. The food motive was disregarded as the Cambodians did not take any foodstocks and were apparently just out for blood in retaliation for perceived Thai involvement.<sup>92</sup> Although understandable in the light of





events, Cambodia did much to alienate world public opinion which was unaware of the extent of Cambodia's internal turmoil aggravated as it was because of Hanoi's involvement.

Vietnam obviously wanted to regain supreme in Indo-China and did not want to align itself with China as this would jeopardize its preeminent status. Cambodia's resistance towards becoming a junior sibling in Vietnam's family may have had much to do with succeeding events.

Cambodia was beginning to show concern about its isolation as seen by Ieng Sary's late March statement that "we have been attacked from all sides." Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand were all placing increasing pressure on the beleaguered regime. Ieng Sary, possibly hoping Malaysia and Singapore would intercede in Cambodia's behalf with Thailand, asserted that "we are not communists...we are revolutionaries." He further assured them that Cambodia had no intention to export its revolution.<sup>93</sup>

During April 11-17, 1977, riots were reported in Siem Reap province in another phase of anti-regime activity. The incidents were almost totally limited to Khmer Rouge soldiers although there was some civilian participation. These incidents were suppressed and followed by widescale purges of civilians and communists.<sup>94</sup>

It is important to note that neither the anti-regime attempts in January nor the subsequent turmoil in April was widely known outside of Cambodia. It was months before



the news was revealed to the outside world and it was not Cambodia but Thailand who broke the news. Cambodia's reticence in openly accusing Vietnam indicated that Cambodians thought that the situation had gone beyond hope of peaceful reconciliation and justified retaliatory raids.

On April 17--the second anniversary of the Khmer Rouge ascendance to power--the Khmer Rouge unleashed a retaliatory attack on border villages in Vietnam. Subsequently, on April 30--the anniversary of Hanoi's victory in South Vietnam--the Cambodians launched a second major attack on Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> The first attack was to preserve Cambodia's independence against outside pressures aimed at eroding that independence. The second attack may have been to remind Vietnam that the Khmer Rouge had played a part in the victory over the "American imperialists" and therefore deserved to be treated as an equal. As will be seen, Vietnam used these Cambodian attacks to explain its retaliation against the regime which so strenuously opposed joining with Vietnam in a "special relationship."



## V. THE WAR YEARS: 1977 AND 1978

### A. INTRODUCTION

The momentous events in Cambodia during the early months of 1977 marked the beginning of the end for not only the Pol Pot regime but for an independent Cambodia as well. Vietnam could no longer rely on indigenous elements within Cambodia to overthrow the Phnom Penh regime as those forces were decimated in purges following the turmoil in April 1977. Vietnam, therefore, had to either commit its military to action or abandon its goal of an Indo-Chinese Federation led by Hanoi. As history shows, Vietnam chose the former option rather than the latter and hastened preparations for an invasion of Cambodia.

The first Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia conducted in the latter half of 1977 was executed in relative secrecy. Cambodia's reticence in publicizing its problems with Vietnam has already been alluded to. Vietnam, too, had no desire to have its aggressive behavior publicized especially after its partner, the Soviet Union, to garner support for a Soviet sponsored Collective Security Pact declared so piously in May 1977 that "annexation of territory through aggression" was impermissible.<sup>1</sup> Cambodia was eventually forced to abandon its silence in September



when the border war began to jeopardize its fate. But it was not until December 31, 1977, when Cambodia severed relations with Vietnam that the severity of the border war was recognized by the rest of the world. After that time, Vietnam could not avert the world's gaze and had to place added emphasis on diplomacy to achieve its aims. Vietnam's first invasion of Cambodia in 1977 ended in failure because of the unexpected tenacity exhibited by the outnumbered Khmer Rouge.

One result of Vietnam's 1977 invasion of Cambodia was China's abandonment of official neutrality between the Indo-Chinese states and assumption of support for Cambodia. This meant that Vietnam's next venture against Cambodia would necessarily have to take into account the possibility of China's active involvement.

With Soviet help in the planning process, Vietnam readied a military and diplomatic offensive aimed at preventing China's use of force to sway events. Vietnam rapidly improved relations with ASEAN and the U.S. to obtain their neutrality in events to follow while the Soviet Union moved to neutralize Japan.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China and not between the U.S. and Vietnam set the stage for a Chinese invasion of Vietnam following Vietnam's victory over Cambodia. The intricate web of diplomacy worked in China's favor when, to Vietnam's





dismay, it was the Soviet Union and not China which was deterred from action. This chapter begins with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in April 1977 and ends with the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in February 1979.

#### B. BEGINNING OF A NEW CHAPTER, APRIL 1977

Without knowledge of the April incidents, the world press tended to interpret Cambodia's actions against Vietnam in May as blatant aggression against Vietnam by a paranoic Cambodian communist regime. The press was more disposed to blaming the diplomatically inept Khmer Rouge for the incidents rather than the urbane Vietnamese who had more experience dealing with world opinion. To Cambodia's detriment, widely publicized tales of genocide in Cambodia while omitting mention of a probable cause for the killings compounded Cambodia's apparent guilt. If it were not for Vietnam's instigation of anti-regime turmoil there would not have been the need for numerous purges that decimated great numbers of the Cambodian population. Because of the erroneous interpretation of Cambodia's actions, Vietnam was able to project the image of an innocent victim being attacked by an irrational Cambodia. Due to the adverse publicity given the Cambodians, it was not always apparent that its border actions against Vietnam in 1977 and in the next year might well have been primarily defensive in nature.



In May 1977 both Cambodia and Vietnam made regular forays into the other's territory resulting in high casualties on both sides. A May 8 Vietnamese attack in Cambodia which resulted in 80 Vietnamese casualties illustrates the intensity of the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Frequent Cambodian battle zones in Vietnam included Chau Doc, a border crossing point, and Ha Tien, located at the extreme portion of mainland Vietnam across from Cambodia. Cambodia's strategy was apparently to seal the border as these sites and future battle areas such as Tay Ninh were on major routes leading into Cambodia.

The task of sealing the borders was too formidable a task for the limited number of Khmer Rouge, many of which were required for internal security in the wake of revolts in Cambodia. Therefore, to more efficiently utilize its forces in preventing enemy infiltration into Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge attempted to move its borders to more defensible frontiers. For example, Cambodia's attacks on Ha Tien were probably designed to move the Cambodian-Vietnamese border to a river to enhance Cambodia's defensive posture.

Cambodia apparently used a similar strategy in Thailand beginning that summer. According to Richard Nations, "the pattern of incidents along the 500-mile Thai-Cambodian frontier...indicates Phnom Penh's desire to seal the border where it is most open--the 50-mile stretch of open forest



and farmland between the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet to the South and Sangae village in Ta Phraya district to the North." This historical invasion route into Cambodia--the Watthana Pass--is the only area in eastern Thailand offering relatively unimpeded access into Cambodia; elsewhere the territory is mountainous and crisscrossed by rivers. Denigrating exaggerated reports of the Khmer Rouge's blood thirstiness, Cambodia in August distributed leaflets to the Thai population in the region warning them to vacate the area.<sup>3</sup>

Cambodia's attempts to strengthen its defenses along the poorly demarcated Thai and Vietnamese borders jeopardized rather than insured Phnom Penh's future. Despite the fact that Cambodia's moves were mainly defensive, they were perceived by the outside world as primarily offensive in nature. In the meantime, through the Spring and Summer of 1977 Vietnam made diplomatic and military preparations for the inevitable war with Cambodia. In May, besides the border war between Cambodia and Vietnam, several events took place which would have an impact on the future of Cambodia. The first event was Vietnam's Vice Minister Hoang Van Loi's secret visit to Phnom Penh reportedly to discuss Cambodia's attendance at a conference of Indo-Chinese states planned to convene later in 1977.<sup>4</sup> The secrecy surrounding the trip, however, casts doubt on the assumption that Cambodia's attendance at an Indo-Chinese



summit was the main purpose of the visit. Hanoi's subsequent actions cause one to suspect that an ultimatum of some sort was presented to the Cambodians. Vietnam may have attempted to coerce Cambodia into an Indo-Chinese federation and/or demanded Cambodia's acquiescence to Vietnam's territorial demands.

On May 20 Vietnam unilaterally preclaimed sovereignty over 12-mile territorial waters with a 200-mile economic zone, and also declared a 12-mile contiguous zone for security purposes.<sup>5</sup> Cambodia's response was to make a lengthy radio broadcast listing forty-four islands that it claimed.<sup>6</sup> Phnom Penh's reaction to what otherwise may have been viewed as an innocent announcement reflecting a trend by many countries to expand their sea resources indicates that Cambodia believed Hanoi was renewing its claims over territorial seas which Hanoi had formally agreed to abandon.

Vietnam's expansion of its territorial seas may also have been aimed against China, Cambodia's protector. On May 14 Vietnam's ally, the Soviet Union, warned the West against diverting Chinese expansion towards others, accused China of attempting to disrupt U.S.-U.S.S.R. detente and of stirring up territorial disputes.<sup>7</sup> The statement may be viewed as a deterrent to Chinese reaction to Vietnam's possible actions against Cambodia. During the summer China and Vietnam engaged in continual arguments over their relative rights in the Spratly Islands.<sup>8</sup>





Vietnam's conflicts with China can properly be viewed in the light of deteriorating Cambodian-Vietnamese relations. In late May the Khmer Rouge rounded up 500 ethnic Vietnamese families, executing many of them in eastern Cambodia.<sup>9</sup> This event signaled that Cambodia would not accede to Vietnam's demands by anything short of military conquest.

In July according to Vietnamese sources, the Khmer Rouge decided that they "must not only stop them (the Vietnamese) and annihilate them on our territory but must cross the border to stop them and annihilate them right on their own territory. This is intended to cause more difficulties to them and increase their fear of us."

At the same time Vietnam made the decision to crack down on the South to accelerate collectivization and start the movement of people to the New Economic Zones,<sup>10</sup> and to neutralize the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam. From that time on the Overseas Chinese were exposed to discriminatory policies and ration cuts, especially if they refused to accept Vietnamese citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

From July onward, Vietnam moved rapidly in its military preparations. On July 8 Thailand reported that Vietnam was building up its forces in Laos.<sup>12</sup> News of this development was followed closely by the arrival in Vientiane on July 15 of the highest-level Vietnamese delegation sent abroad to that date. Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, Vice Premier Pham Hung and the political commissar of the army, General Chu Huy Man, were among the luminaries representing Vietnam



in discussions which would lead to legitimizing Vietnamese military presence in Laos. On July 17 Laos and Vietnam signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation instituting a "special relationship" between the two countries in which Laos would follow the Vietnamese political line. Kaysone Phomvihane of Laos claimed that the pact arose from an "urgent objective" to defeat the common enemy which is "trying to carry out many subtle and perfidious tricks and divisive schemes in order to weaken revolution in each country." In addition to formalizing a relationship that already existed, the pact provided for Vietnamese economic and military support over a 25-year period. Article 7 of the pact provided the first legal basis for a Vietnamese military penetration into Cambodia. Vietnam did not waste any time taking advantage of that provision.<sup>13</sup>

On August 1 a Bangkok newspaper reported that large numbers of Vietnamese troops were moving towards Cambodia through southern Laos.<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Thanin on August 6 revealed that conflicts had occurred between Cambodia and Laos in addition to the regular skirmishes between Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>15</sup> Indicating that a Vietnamese invasion was impending, General Giap visited army units in the Mekong Delta near Kampot on August 8 calling for combat readiness.<sup>16</sup> On August 14 Cambodia mobilized troops in four areas "to stop enemies from encroaching on Cambodian territory."<sup>17</sup> Thailand on August 23 went on full alert thinking that the



increasing number of Vietnamese troops along its border in Laos were meant to attack Thailand.<sup>18</sup>

### C. THE SEPTEMBER CLIMAX, 1977

In September clashes between Cambodia and Vietnam turned into full-scale battles reflecting the completion of Vietnam's military preparations. According to a Vietnamese official the Party released the army at this time to actively counterattack Cambodia. Major battles erupted between Cambodia and Vietnam on September 1 when Vietnam conducted deep raids into Cambodia.<sup>19</sup> Phnom Penh later claimed that Vietnamese troops in September encroached as far as Stoeng which is 20 km within Cambodia.<sup>20</sup> By September 18 the attacks were severe enough to force Cambodia into announcing that its troops were engaged in battle with the Vietnamese for defense of Prey Veng province.<sup>21</sup>

To compound Phnom Penh's problems, Cambodia was also experiencing internal turmoil during the month of September. According to Thailand, Cambodia successfully quashed an attempted coup sometime prior to Pol Pot's September 28 visit to China. Congratulatory messages from both China and North Korea to the Phnom Penh regime confirm the fact that an inner party struggle was taking place in Cambodia. According to the North Korean message from Kim Il Sung to Pol Pot, the Cambodian people had smashed "the counter-revolutionary group of spies who had committed subversive



activities and sabotage, working themselves into the revolutionary ranks for a long time at the instigation of foreign imperialists." The message further noted that the persons involved were "unmasked and liquidated."<sup>22</sup>

As a result of the coup attempt, another massive purge wracked Cambodia. Khmer Rouge army officers up to the rank of colonel crossed into Thailand because of the ferocity of the purge aimed at both the remnants of the 6,000 pro-Vietnamese communists trained in Vietnam in the 1950's and the units for which they were responsible. According to the survivors, 40-50 percent of every village had been wiped out to eliminate the traitors.<sup>23</sup>

In a repetition of history, just as in April 1977 following another coup attempt, Cambodia again lashed out at the suspected perpetrator of the plot; on September 24, according to Vietnamese accounts, Cambodia made its second major attack into Vietnam resulting in 2,000 Vietnamese casualties in Tay Ninh Province and economic disruption in the New Economic Zones.<sup>24</sup>

On September 25, the day following Cambodia's incursion into Vietnam, Pol Pot dropped the pretense that the Khmer Rouge was not communist and claimed that "foreign friends" wished it to be known that the communist party was responsible for the victory in 1975.<sup>25</sup> The timing of the announcement may not have been coincidental as Pol Pot needed some pretext to visit China to discuss Cambodia's dire problems with Vietnam and to gain assurances of Chinese support.







Celebration of the 17th Anniversary of Cambodia's Communist Party offered the perfect solution.

China may have insisted upon a cover story for Pol Pot's visit as it was attempting to maintain an official neutrality between Vietnam and Cambodia. Otherwise, a visit by Pol Pot without a bonafide explanation would have drawn much suspicion since that leader had not made a public excursion from Cambodia since 1975 (though he did make secret trips to Hanoi and Peking in 1975 to smoothe the border crisis with Vietnam that year).<sup>26</sup> China, of course, was not neutral and favored Cambodia's position as illustrated by a smuggled document obtained by Taiwan sources. According to the document, Foreign Minister Huang Hua in a speech to party cadres blamed Vietnam for the border problems and declared China's willingness to support Cambodia. Huang was quoted as saying, "Self-conceited Vietnam deemed that without its help Cambodia could not have been liberated. Consequently, it assumed the airs of a Big Brother demanding obeisance from Cambodia in everything. After the liberation, Cambodia had to ask repeatedly for Vietnam to withdraw its troops. Although Vietnam eventually acceded to the request, its troops remained deployed along the border....Naturally, it is difficult for Cambodia to swallow the situation." Concerning China's support, Huang further averred, "We support the stand of Cambodia and her people against Soviet revisionist social



imperialism, and will not watch indifferently any intervention on Cambodian sovereignty or coveting of Cambodian territory by social imperialism. We will support her people in their struggle." The document also indicates that China offered to act as a mediator in the conflict between the two parties.<sup>27</sup>

Pol Pot and his entourage arrived in Peking on September 28 to a tumultuous welcome by 100,000 persons and was met at the airport by Hua and Teng. Pol Pot could not resist revealing one purpose behind the visit as he denounced Thai and Vietnamese territorial incursions against Cambodia in a speech presented that day.<sup>28</sup> However, the fiction that the celebration was the main purpose of the visit was maintained and even extended to Vietnam where the Cambodian ambassador to Vietnam held a party in Hanoi in honor of the occasion. Pham Van Dong was in attendance attempting to maintain the illusion of friendship between the two countries.<sup>29</sup>

The solidarity between Cambodia and Vietnam exhibited in celebrations in Hanoi was illusory. About that same time the Cambodian delegation in Moscow was packing up its possessions to return to Cambodia. A perfunctory congratulatory message from the U.S.S.R. to Cambodia never reached the Cambodian officials who had already vacated their embassy without informing their host.<sup>30</sup> The point of no return between Cambodia and the U.S.S.R. had been reached;



Cambodia was now waging its war of survival, not only against Vietnam, but also against its sponsor, the U.S.S.R.

Vietnam was not unaware of the real purpose behind Pol Pot's visit to China. According to a Vietnamese source, Vietnam decided against mounting an immediate counter-offensive following Cambodia's September 24 attack because it did not want to provoke Pol Pot who was visiting China.<sup>31</sup> More likely, Vietnam did not want to improve Cambodia's argument against Vietnam by engaging at that moment in an aggressive act.

Though Hanoi was forced to postpone its counterattack, there were several indications that an offensive was being planned. In late September there was speculation that General Giap made another trip to South Vietnam to make preparations for the next military campaign.<sup>32</sup> A military delegation from Laos visited Hanoi late September possibly to offer its support to their benefactor.<sup>33</sup> Of possible military significance, Vietnam made several attempts to acquire increased food supplies from Western countries to ease a shortfall of 1-2 million tons of rice.

Vietnam requested emergency food aid from Denmark during the last week of September and in October tried to obtain wheat from Australia.<sup>34</sup> In Vietnam the military provides a significant portion of the agricultural labor; therefore, a military campaign would require vast inputs of food to replace that lost when the military abandoned its



agricultural tasks. The food problem is compounded by the fact that the military would still consume its share of the food although it no longer had a hand in the production.

Another sign of an impending war was Hanoi's attacks against ethnic minorities which, it claimed, continued to resist the regime. Vu Lap, the chairman of Vietnam's Central Nationalities Commission, complained in a late September issue of Tap Chi Cong San that "since liberation day the reactionaries have secretly incited disturbances in a number of ethnic minority regions and have taken advantage of our temporary difficulties and our cadres' weaknesses and shortcomings in implementing some policies to sow division among ethnic minorities."<sup>35</sup> The article may have been a response to a Vietnamese decision during the summer to clamp down on the ethnic Chinese and others who were politically unreliable.

Vietnam made several open attempts to negotiate with Cambodia throughout October prior to Vietnamese offensives. In addition, Pham Hung made a secret visit to China early in October, probably to confer with Pol Pot.<sup>36</sup> Pham Hung's visit was more likely an attempt to convince China of Vietnam's peaceful intentions rather than to negotiate a settlement with Cambodia.

Upon Pol Pot's return to Cambodia, Vietnam launched its long awaited counteroffensive against Cambodia. The attack was severe enough to require Pol Pot's return to China on





October 13 where he may have conferred with Phan Hien who was reportedly in China for that purpose. But discussions that month again failed, and Vietnam conducted another offensive into Cambodia in late October.<sup>37</sup>

Indicating that Vietnam had discarded negotiation as a viable means to coerce Cambodia from its independent course, Vietnam began broadcasting on October 31 the theme of Cambodian brutality.<sup>38</sup>

#### D. AFTERMATH OF THE VIETNAMESE ATTACK

The state of unofficial war between Cambodia and Vietnam required both Vietnam and Cambodia to improve relations with Thailand. This task was significantly facilitated by Kriangsak's succession to Thanin in power in Bangkok. On November 11 Cambodia proposed talks to settle their disputes, and Kriangsak quickly accepted the offer.<sup>39</sup> Cambodia, of course, needed every asset it had to wage its war of survival against Vietnam and could not afford to have a two-front war against both Vietnam and Thailand. Border incidents were officially blamed on anti-Pol Pot elements who wished to sabotage good relations between Thailand and Cambodia.<sup>40</sup>

Vietnam, too, sought to improve relations with Thailand to avert a major confrontation along the Thai-Laotian border and to prevent a Thai alliance with Cambodia.<sup>41</sup> Improved Thai-Laotian relations in October and November reflected the general uptrend experienced in Thai-Vietnamese relations.



On October 18 Thailand lifted a three-week ban on oil shipments across the Mekong to Laos while in mid-November Thailand resumed shipping of jet fuel to Vientiane.<sup>42</sup> Also in mid-November, Thailand for the first time began repatriating refugees to their country of origin.<sup>43</sup> This removed a major point of aggravation between Thailand and both Cambodia and Laos. On December 2 both Laos and Vietnam issued statements calling for improved relations with Thailand. The Vietnamese statement was part of a joint communique with Thailand calling for the establishment of full diplomatic relations as soon as possible.<sup>44</sup>

As the battles between Cambodia and Vietnam intensified, Sino-Vietnamese relations took a concomitant downturn. Vietnam claimed to have captured Chinese nationals fighting for Cambodia during battles in October, but China denied that allegation.<sup>45</sup> In late November, during another Le Duan visit to Peking, China warned Vietnam of Soviet intentions towards developing countries.<sup>46</sup> A Jenmin Jih Pao editorial hinted that Vietnam should safeguard that which it won with the end of war in 1975. The coolness of Le Duan's reception and the significant rise in the number of ethnic Chinese leaving Vietnam reflected the worsening relations between China and Vietnam.<sup>47</sup> On December 3, indicating open Chinese preference to Cambodia, a high-level Chinese delegation visited Cambodia in the period of tension prior to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.<sup>48</sup>



China's diplomatic efforts on Cambodia's behalf were anathema to the Vietnamese. In addition to its attempts to improve relations with Thailand, Cambodia, with China's encouragement, began to improve relations with Burma and ASEAN. On November 26 Cambodia hosted a visit by Ne Win of Burma, thereby ending a lapse of relations of two and one-half years.<sup>49</sup> Cambodia also indicated for the first time in early December that it was willing to engage in bilateral trade with ASEAN.<sup>50</sup>

#### E. THE DECEMBER OFFENSIVE, 1977

In the first week of December Vietnam launched a major offensive into Cambodia. Vietnam's combined arms force of infantry, armor, artillery and air power immediately pushed the Cambodians back 10-15 miles from their border in the Parrot's Beak area.<sup>51</sup> Cambodia claimed that Vietnam eventually intruded into its territory to a distance only 50 miles from Phnom Penh.<sup>52</sup> Approximately 60,000 Vietnamese and 20,000 Cambodians were engaged in the battle which resulted in high casualties for both sides.<sup>53</sup> The Cambodians, claiming that they were caught off-guard without adequate forces in the area to stave off the Vietnamese attack, reported that there were greater than 2,500 casualties on the Cambodia side alone.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the surprise invasion, Vietnam could not achieve victory due to the unexpected resistance from the Khmer Rouge.



Additional problems organizationally precluded complete Vietnamese success: "On several occasions an army unit missed the opportunity of annihilating the enemy, or suffered losses because of laxity in making preparations and implementing regulations." Sloppy maintenance forced a large number of mechanized vehicles out of service.<sup>55</sup> On December 31 Khieu Samphan in the 45-minute announcement severing relations, accused Vietnam of waging "an undeclared and premeditated war in the same or even worse manner than the Thieu-Ky and South Korean mercenary troops of the past." Cambodia demanded that all Vietnamese diplomats leave Cambodia by January 7, 1978.<sup>56</sup>

#### F. PREPARING FOR THE CHRISTMAS INVASION, 1978

The most important factor enabling the successful Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 was the Soviet-Vietnamese tie. For Vietnam, the importance of that association cannot be overstated; without the Soviet Union's encouragement and alliance with Hanoi, Vietnam would never have openly ventured against an ally of China. Without the Soviet Union's assistance in planning and equipping the Vietnamese army for the Christmas invasion of Cambodia, Vietnam would have had to face an interminable war against an army well-suited for guerrilla operations. The crucial value of Soviet support was apparent immediately after Cambodia's announcement December 31, 1977, severing relations with Vietnam.





At that time the Soviet Union reportedly urged the Vietnamese to engage in a blitzkrieg operation to overthrow the Pol Pot regime.<sup>57</sup> Vietnam, however, wished to avoid appearing the aggressor and continued its strategy of subversion backed by military muscle. Hanoi's real motives, though, were neatly masked by frequent calls for negotiation by both the Soviet Union and Vietnam who blamed Cambodian intransigence for continued conflict.

Vietnam's retention of Cambodian territory was the main barrier to Cambodia's acquiescence to discussions. Though Vietnam agreed to a partial withdrawal of its forces in January, 1978 it showed every intention of retaining the territory it still possessed. Indicating that its stay was not of a temporary nature, Vietnam immediately began forming administrative districts in occupied areas. Negotiation with Vietnam while Hanoi's forces remained in Cambodia was, therefore, impossible. Although Hanoi would achieve some propaganda value by Cambodia's refusal to negotiate, Phnom Penh could ill-afford to risk its survival by compromising with Vietnam.

In conjunction with its calls for negotiation, Vietnamese diplomats made several trips to offer assurances of its non-aggression intentions. Nguyen Van Trinh in early January toured Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, indicating to each that Vietnam had no desire to spread socialism. Phan Hien, meanwhile, ventured to Peking where



he reportedly tried for a week to contact Cambodian diplomats. Vietnam did not want to be accused of not making every effort to improve relations with Cambodia. Peking, however, was not responsive to Vietnam's initiatives.

In early 1978 China abandoned its over position of neutrality between Cambodia and Vietnam, and learned unequivocally toward Cambodia.<sup>58</sup> On January 18 China sent Teng Ying-chao--the widow of Chou En-lai--on a goodwill mission to Cambodia. She stressed non-aggression and respect for territorial integrity in barbs aimed at Hanoi. Indicating that China wished to end Cambodia's isolation and improve Phnom Penh's relations with its neighbors, Teng Ying-chao was accompanied by two specialists on Southeast Asia, namely Deputy Foreign Minister Han Nien-lung and Asian Affairs Deputy Shen Ping.<sup>59</sup> On February 1, illustrating that Cambodia accepted Peking's advice, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to normalize relations at the earliest possible moment.<sup>60</sup> Thai Foreign Minister Upadit commented that it was necessary for Cambodia to be free of aggression and expansion or the rest of Southeast Asia would "not enjoy peace and security."<sup>61</sup> China had succeeded in laying the groundwork for the Thai-Cambodian alliance which Vietnam greatly feared.

While Vietnam was reassuring its neighbors that its aims were not aggressive, Hanoi readied its plans for the subjugation of Cambodia with Soviet support. In late



January General Giap accompanied by General Tran Van Tra visited battle areas to assess the tactical situation.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently in February both made visits to Moscow, probably to formulate strategies against Cambodia. General Giap's secret visit was reportedly to gauge the extent of Soviet support while General Tran Van Tra's official purpose in Moscow was to represent Hanoi during celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the Soviet army.<sup>63</sup> The February visits of General Ivan Pavlovsky to Laos and Central Committee member G. V. Romanov to Vietnam indicate a high amount of Soviet involvement in planning Vietnam's actions against Cambodia.

During Pavlovsky's surprise visit to Laos Pavlovsky reportedly conferred with General Van Tien Dung, the head of the Vietnamese armed forces.<sup>64</sup> General Dung is remembered for his leadership in the decisive April 1975 campaign against Saigon. Likewise, Pavlovsky is a master of the lightning offensive. In the 1960's he successfully promoted the Manchurian campaign of 1945 as the model for future Soviet campaigns. The Manchurian campaign is especially noted for its cover and deception practices (military and political) which resulted in the total surprise of the enemy. Within six days the Japanese Kwantung Army was enveloped, forcing its surrender.<sup>65</sup> In 1968 Pavlovsky had the opportunity to test his theories when he was in charge of the Warsaw Pact forces which invaded Czechoslovakia. The



similarity in tactics used during Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia which required fifteen days for victory points to Pavlovsky's hand in the planning. Pavlovsky's presence at this stage and his meeting with General Dung indicates that some type of Vietnamese military campaign was in the offing.

In the same time frame as General Pavlovsky's visit to Laos, G. V. Romanov, 1st Secretary of the Leningrad Oblast Party Committee, began his visit to Ho Chi City, the headquarters for Vietnam's military activity against Cambodia. Romanov was officially in Ho Chi Minh City to represent Leningrad during ceremonies to establish sisterhood between the two cities. It is possible that Romanov conferred with Le Duc Tho who was dispatched to the South. According to FEER correspondent Nayan Chanda, "Before each major military move in the past--the 1968 Tet offensive, the 1972 spring offensive and especially before the final push for Saigon in April 1975--Tho was dispatched south to make sure that generals in the field correctly implemented the party directive."<sup>66</sup> Perhaps a similar plan was in the wind.

Shortly after the visits by Pavlovsky and Romanov, Hanoi decided to back an all out anti-Pol Pot rebel movement in Cambodia and crack down on the Chinese merchants in Cholon, the Chinese quarter in Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, the previous Vietnamese directive to kill all captured Cambodians was reversed to provide for the capture of as







many Cambodians alive as possible for use in insurgency activities. Reportedly, Vietnam rewarded soldiers with the equivalent of \$25 and five days leave for each Cambodian captured. An estimated 15,000 Cambodian prisoners were being indoctrinated to fight against their former leaders.<sup>68</sup> It is intriguing that at the same time Vietnam was paying bounty for the capture of Cambodians, Vietnam was also preparing to ask the United Nations to provide aid for refugees making their way into Vietnam from Cambodia.<sup>69</sup> Humanitarian aid was, therefore, an indirect means by which Vietnam intended to enlist more recruits for its plans against Cambodia.

On March 24 Vietnam began to implement its policies against the ethnic Chinese. At that time a large military and police force surrounded Cholon in preparation of enforcing a Pham Van Dong directive closing 30,000 private businesses.<sup>70</sup> In early April Ho Chi Minh City was closed to all foreigners due to the unrest caused by Hanoi's new dictates.<sup>71</sup>

Vietnam's action against the ethnic Chinese was an attempt to neutralize a potentially hostile force within that country and was similar to Hanoi's policies against other prospective troublemakers. In February Laos and Vietnam had undertaken an offensive against the Meo tribesmen who, Hanoi feared, could be induced to align with China to advance their goal of autonomy in Laos.



Hanoi's action against the Meos was harsher than that meted out to the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam but the principle was the same.

The Soviet Union's alert status along the Manchurian border with China was another possible indication that Vietnam was readying a major attack on Cambodia which could conceivably provoke both Chinese and Soviet intervention. In March 1978 Sino-Soviet relations were at a perennial low point, leading Teng Hsiao-ping to warn the Soviet Union that it could never hope to defeat the masses of China.<sup>72</sup> In late March Secretary Brezhnev accompanied by Defense Minister Ustinov journeyed to the Soviet Far East to inspect military installations and observe military maneuvers. For the ailing Brezhnev to make such a difficult trip illustrated the gravity of the tensions between the U.S.S.R. and China.<sup>73</sup> Frequent border clashes and black-out drills illustrated the degree of China-Russia tension.<sup>74</sup>

In early April a force of 100,000 Vietnamese troops were reportedly massed along the Cambodia border,<sup>75</sup> and launched a series of attacks on five separate areas along Cambodia's border. Vietnam in April also began to move warplanes from the north to the south.<sup>76</sup> The invasion plans Vietnam made during the Pavlovskyomanov visits in February appeared to be nearing fruition. China, however, remained the major hindrance to Vietnamese success.



On April 19, according to Swedish sources, fighting between Vietnam and China again broke out along their border. Reportedly tanks were used indicating it was not a minor skirmish. Both China and Vietnam setn reinforcements to the battle area and entrenched for future confrontations.<sup>77</sup> Apparently anticipating future conflict with China, General Van Tien Dung in late April made publicized visits to an anti-aircraft facility in Haiphong and a missile base at Ha Long, one of several new missile sites in Vietnam aimed at China. At Ha Long General Dung told personnel they had "pressing tasks to be carried out urgently." A Soviet delegation from Bladivostok visited Haiphong in the same time frame illustrating Soviet support against a possible Chinese attack.<sup>78</sup>

All previous Vietnamese campaigns to overthrow Pol Pot were conducted in conjunction with forces within Cambodia. In the developing scenario under analysis, Vietnam was once again preparing an incursion against Phnom Penh, in all probability with the assistance of insurgents in Cambodia. During May there were reports of massive purges in Cambodia and it was later disclosed that eastern Cambodia was the locus of an insurrection.<sup>79</sup> Vietnam's thrusts toward Phnom Penh in April were, therefore, possibly effected to weaken Khmer defenses in order to assist the insurgents, while the feints at five areas around the border were possibly made to confuse Combodian defenses



prior to the main attack and to guarantee the success of any possible insurrection.

Previous purges decimated the ranks of earlier insurgency forces and new recruits from within Cambodia would have been difficult to come by especially if reports of Pol Pot's thorough purges are accurate.

#### G. THE DOUBLE CHALLENGE OF THE S.R.V: CAMBODIA AND CHINA

The insurrection in Eastern Cambodia of April, 1978 was intriguing for two reasons. First of all, according to Cambodian accounts, the aim was to overthrow the Pol Pot regime, and if that failed the insurgents were to take over the eastern zone of Cambodia and proclaim a new state.<sup>80</sup> Vietnam would undoubtedly be the protector for this new state. If the Cambodian report is true, Vietnam's immediate aim was to gain the rice bowl of Cambodia which is the area east of the Mekong River. Secondly, both Heng Samrin and So Phim were leaders of this insurrection and were forced to flee Cambodia when the insurrection faded.<sup>81</sup> So Phim was later killed while leading pro-Hanoi forces while Heng Samrin later became the puppet ruler of Cambodia under the Vietnamese tutelage.

The failure of this insurrection prompted Vietnam to develop insurgency forces entirely from Khmers residing outside of Cambodia, i.e., prisoners and refugees. Radio broadcasts indicated Vietnam had not abandoned insurgency forces entirely from Khmers residing outside of Cambodia,





i.e., prisoners and refugees. Radio broadcasts indicated Vietnam had not abandoned insurgency as the method to disguise Vietnamese aggression against Cambodia. According to reports insurgencies were either about to occur or were in the process of occurring throughout the summer of 1978.<sup>82</sup>

While Vietnam was attempting to encourage the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime with as little use of Vietnamese forces as possible, the Overseas Chinese issue in Vietnam took on a new significance. Both China and Vietnam saw advantages in exploiting the issues. China desired to draw attention to Vietnamese transgressions, to show that Hanoi was no better than the Phnom Penh regime Hanoi continued to berate. The ill-treatment of the ethnic Chinese was also an excuse for China to cease aid to Vietnam. It was no longer logical for China to grant aid to Vietnam especially since Hanoi was battering on its ally and was firmly ensconced in the Soviet camp. The Overseas Chinese issue allowed China to exit gracefully from its illogical association with Vietnam.

Hanoi, on its part, soon saw advantages in magnifying the ethnic Chinese issue. It provided a cover for Hanoi's aggressive actions along Vietnam's border with Cambodia, and it would have been extremely awkward for China to engage in warfare with Vietnam while it appeared the Overseas Chinese was the main precipitating factor. Several countries in Southeast Asia with large Chinese populations believed



that Vietnam's sanctions against the ethnic Chinese was an internal matter, thus Peking's action against Hanoi because of the ethnic Chinese could mean China would use a similar pretext for intervention in their countries. Vietnam was, therefore, able to stall for time while it made military preparations for an offensive into Cambodia.

China claimed that every time negotiations on the issue of the ethnic Chinese were opened (discussions were convened five times in the May to September time frame), Vietnam increased its hostilities against Cambodia and China.<sup>84</sup> Events appear to substantiate China's claims that Vietnam used the negotiations to mask its aggression elsewhere. The Overseas Chinese issue, to Cambodia's detriment, replaced the Vietnamese-Cambodian confrontation from the front page in newspapers obscuring Vietnam's escalating military activity against Cambodia. China's decision to engage in fruitless discussions throughout the Summer of 1978 probably means China, like Vietnam, was stalling for time. It, too, had to prepare for military confrontations against Vietnam and its protector, the Soviet Union.

On June 7 Teng accused Vietnam of taking ten steps against China and said Hanoi was in the process of "taking its 11th step." China accordingly decided to take a step of its own, to reduce aid to Vietnam.<sup>85</sup>

One step Teng was referring to was Vietnam's actions against Cambodia. In mid-June, Vietnam's military



preparations resulted in an offensive which was a significant escalation of the war. Some analysts claim that the purpose of Vietnam's offensive at this time was to relieve the pressure on resistance forces.<sup>86</sup> Vietnam's strategy through June was to bleed Cambodia to death by the continuous application of internal and external pressures. Time was the only necessary ingredient to accomplish the task, but time was lacking due to Hanoi's greatly escalating problems with Peking. Vietnam, therefore, came to accept a Soviet-style strategy of a lightning offensive though it would still use token Cambodian forces to mask Vietnam's aggression; it was in mid-1978 that Vietnam began to stockpile for its dry season invasion of Cambodia.<sup>87</sup>

Concomitantly, both Vietnam and China improved their border defenses. In June Vietnamese military preparations against China included recruiting of one division of self-defense militia for each of its districts and digging tunnels in the northern areas of Vietnam.<sup>88</sup> Indicating that Hanoi expected action against China, General Giap accompanied by Soviet advisors visited border regions with China.<sup>89</sup> Soviet support was also readily apparent in other areas. There were reports that the Soviet Union was building a base on Cat Ba Island which is located outside Haiphong harbor.<sup>90</sup> The U.S.S.R. was also responsible for installing three radar stations along China's Yunnan province.<sup>91</sup>



China, too, was making war preparations as indicated by travelers reports. That June visitors to Kwangsi Province in China reported seeing military convoys heading south towards the Vietnamese border. They saw flashes in the night and heard booms indicating that China was engaging in night maneuvers.<sup>92</sup> By the end of June it was no longer inconceivable that the two socialist neighbors would engage in a major conflict.

China's irritation with Vietnam was greatly exasperated by Vietnam's joining COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) on June 30. Vietnam's joining COMECON was a closely guarded secret; other members were not advised in advance. The U.S.S.R. apparently would not grant any more aid, without this concession on Vietnam's part to bind it securely to the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup> Vietnam's relations with China were rapidly souring, and on the same day it joined COMECON, two of three of Hanoi's consulates in Southern China (the third to follow shortly) were in the process of being closed due to Chinese insistence. Tensions with China were bound to escalate even more rapidly in the months ahead as Vietnam approached its goals against Cambodia. A closer Soviet-Vietnamese association would, therefore, be to Vietnam's benefit to deter possible Chinese hostilities against Vietnam. Hanoi also anticipated China's announcement on July 3 to discontinue all aid and remove its advisors, and had found in the U.S.S.R. an alternative for its previous Chinese source of assistance.







In late July Cambodia's Minister of Defense Son Sen visited Peking hoping to gain Chinese assurances of support against the Vietnamese. China responded by providing Chinese advisors for artillery, air defense and naval units. Hua told Sen "Your struggle is a just one and a just struggle is bound to win. We support your struggle." China's support included arms, food and communications gear for guerrilla bases readied for the inevitable Vietnamese invasion.<sup>94</sup>

Indicating the extent of Cambodia's desperation, Ieng Sary in a Conference of the Non-aligned in Belgrade the last week of July asserted "there is no problem" in establishing relations if the U.S. was willing to do so. This marked a fundamental shift in Cambodia's attitude towards the U.S. Prior to this time Phnom Penh decried the U.S. for allegedly attempting to overthrow the Pol Pot regime by use of the CIA in association with Vietnam. Throughout the summer, Cambodia had been making similar efforts to improve relations with ASEAN.

Cambodia's diplomatic offensive was based on the realization that short of military intervention by China and any allies it could muster, only the weight of world opinion could possibly deter Vietnam's aggression. Cambodia, however, had a difficult task for itself as world opinion continued to perceive Cambodia as the more obnoxious of the two countries. Senator George McGovern, for example, declared on August 21 that he backed U.S. military action against Cambodia to



overthrow the Pol Pot regime.<sup>96</sup> Cambodia fared badly in the news and propaganda media of the world.

In late July Vietnam held a full but unpublicized session of its Communist Party Central Committee, which "often had to leave behind and discard weak elements incapable of enduring trials or bent upon betraying the cause." Le Duan had succeeded in neutralizing his opposition permitting the final steps against Cambodia.<sup>97</sup> In mid-August the Vietnamese Communist Party appealed to all Vietnamese to be ready to fight a full-scale war. The Soviet Union in the same time frame began an airlift of materials to equip Vietnam for its impending dry season offensive against Cambodia and a possible confrontation with China.<sup>98</sup>

Ominously, in late August Cambodian irregular forces trained in Vietnam made their first appearance in the Cambodian conflict.<sup>99</sup> The insurgency to overthrow Pol Pot which Vietnam had been promising all summer was clearly about to commence.

Meanwhile Vietnam resumed its talks with China on the Overseas Chinese issue. Indicating that a critical stage was being approached, a U.S. Congressional delegation reported that Vietnam was almost desperate to establish relations with the U.S.<sup>100</sup> This revelation followed Vietnamese initiatives in July which dropped the requirement for reconstruction aid as the price for normalization. Laos, too, was showing new flexibility towards the U.S., indicating for the first time that it would return remains of U.S. servicemen.<sup>101</sup>



In the last week of August 1978, the Soviet Union completed its airlift of approximately two dozen flights to Vietnam placing Vietnam on a war footing.<sup>102</sup> Only final military and political preparations needed to be made prior to a dry season offensive. In mid-September, Laos reportedly withdrew more than 2,500 civilian and military technicians from northern Laos contiguous to China and replaced them by Vietnamese. Concurrently, a new Laotian-Vietnamese offensive was launched against the Meo tribesmen to prevent their alliance with China, precipitating a new exodus to Thailand.<sup>103</sup> Vietnam also continued the process begun months earlier of moving artillery and infantry to the Laotian-Cambodian border.<sup>104</sup> In late Fall, Vietnam's buildup along the Cambodian border reached a peak. Vietnamese civilians were called upon to set aside food and fuel for an impending war while the North-South rail routes were given to the military for their exclusive use.<sup>105</sup>

By the beginning of September, Vietnam had completed most of its military preparations for an invasion of Cambodia. Its attention shifted at this point to the diplomatic realm to prevent potential rivals from concluding alliances with either Cambodia or China. The Soviet Union, as expected, participated actively by helping Vietnam neutralize ASEAN and by making an effort to influence Japan away from an alliance with China. In addition, Moscow warned the West against building up China's military might. In September



Hanoi decided to make the necessary concessions to improve relations with ASEAN and the U.S.

In early September Pham Van Dong toured ASEAN states to insure their neutrality and if possible to sign a treaty of peace and friendship with each of them. In Thailand, on September 7, Kriangsak and Dong issued a joint communique declaring "The two prime ministers expressed their determination...(to refrain) from carrying out subversion, direct or indirect, against each other and from using force or threatening to use force against each other."<sup>106</sup> Vietnam had succeeded in neutralizing the country in Southeast Asia most likely to come to Cambodia's assistance. Pham Van Dong's assurances that Vietnam would no longer support insurgencies in Thailand was a small price to pay in exchange for Thailand's vow not to engage in the use of force against Vietnam. Though one may argue that Thailand was not bound by the communique, Pham Van Dong indicated his view on the matter during his trip to Malaysia. The final communique between Malaysia and Vietnam, on October 13, included a statement called for peace and friendship. Hussein described the statement as a "pledge" but Dong referred to it as a "treaty."<sup>107</sup>

Meanwhile efforts to normalize relations with the U.S. appeared to be nearing fruition. Throughout the summer Vietnamese diplomats dropped hints that it no longer required reparations prior to normalization of relations. Vietnam's insistence on reparations had been the major barrier to







normalization since 1975. The U.S., during President Carter's first year of office, expressed its willingness to normalize relations first, then discuss aid; but Hanoi refused.

Vietnamese diplomats officially agreed to drop the demand for reparations in September when the U.S. and Vietnam held secret meetings in New York. According to Nguyen Co Thach on September 28, "everything was agreed upon except for the writing down."

Meanwhile, China and Cambodia were as active as the S.R.V. in seeking international friends. On October 23 Teng visited Japan to exchange the instruments of ratification for the Sino-Japanese treaty signed August 12, 1978. The treaty, containing an anti-hegemony clause, was a major diplomatic defeat for the Soviet Union. An August 14 People's Daily article, for instance, claimed "only Soviet social imperialism is unhappy" about the conclusion of the treaty.<sup>108</sup> The Soviet Union showed its displeasure by recalling its ambassador to Japan and by lambasting the treaty as an attempt to encircle the Soviet Union.<sup>109</sup> The Russians interpreted Hua's trip to Romania, Yugoslavia and Iran, in August, as a further deliberate anti-Russian provocation.

During his October visit to Japan, Teng asserted that China did not object to a continuing Japanese military association with the U.S.<sup>110</sup> He also let it "slip" that secret meetings were going on in Washington concerning normalization.<sup>111</sup>



China and the U.S. moved rapidly towards normalization after Brzezinski's visit to China in late May 1978 when he declared the U.S. had "made up its mind" to normalize relations with China.<sup>112</sup> By that time, China was experiencing difficulties with both Vietnam and the Soviet Union and was eager to quicken the pace for normalization. Peking's selection of Chai Tse-min at that time to fill the long-vacant position in the Chinese liaison office and its decision to free 110,000 political prisoners (possibly as an effort to impress President Carter on the human rights issue), were immediate signs that China wished to move rapidly towards normalization of relations with the U.S.<sup>113</sup> Evidences of mutual good will were noticeable both in China and the U.S. throughout the summer. In September when Cambodia's survival became questionable, China quickened the pace for normalization and even indicated its willingness to be more flexible on the Taiwan issue. Encouraged by China's stance, the Carter administration in early October decided to normalize relations with China on January 1.<sup>114</sup>

Cambodia augmented China's diplomatic efforts with those of its own in an attempt to stave off a Vietnamese invasion. In mid-October Ieng Sary visited the United Nations where he invited Secretary Waldheim to visit Cambodia to see for himself if human rights were being violated. To symbolize Cambodia's fight to retain its national identity, Cambodia opened the ancient city of Angkor for visitation by newsmen



and diplomats.<sup>115</sup> In late October Ieng Sary made his own tour of ASEAN states in an attempt to gain their support against Hanoi.

After the flurry of diplomatic activity the Russians and the Vietnamese quickly made their decision to launch a military drive into Cambodia.

On November 1 a high-level delegation from Hanoi, led by Le Duan and Pham Van Dong, set out for Moscow, where, two days later, a treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed. This, they believed, would be the ultimate deterrent in preventing China from coming to the aid of Cambodia. Rather than deter China, the treaty insured Chinese intervention.

Up to the time of the treaty, China encouraged Cambodia to prepare itself for a prolonged struggle of guerrilla warfare against Vietnam. China accepted the fact that Vietnam would eventually gain victory in Cambodia. When told about the treaty while in Thailand, Teng Hsiao-ping reacted with rage, decrying Pham Van Dong as a liar.<sup>116</sup> Shadowed by Firyubin, the deputy Foreign Minister of the U.S.S.R. who was in Southeast Asia at the same time, Teng continued his tour of ASEAN but failed to gain ASEAN's support for action against Vietnam. China's refusal to disclaim support for insurgencies like Vietnam helped prelude ASEAN's support for China against Vietnam. Teng also made a surprise visit to Burma, a country which has acquired new importance to China since Laos and Vietnam



became securely ensconced in the Soviet camp. Upon returning home on November 14, Teng set about consolidating his power. It was perhaps Teng's objective at this early date to assist Cambodia by launching a Chinese attack on Vietnam.

China continued its attempts to normalize relations with the U.S., although Vietnam at the same time pursued its own campaign for American recognition.<sup>117</sup>

#### H. THE CHRISTMAS INVASION AND THE CHINESE ATTACK

In November and December a delicate balance existed between the prospects of war and peace. Vietnam was poised for a push into Cambodia and China was ready to attack Vietnam. Both sides sought through diplomatic means to gain the maximum support or at least tacit acceptance of their plans. While Teng feverishly pursued his courtship of the U.S., the S.R.V. found its solace in stepped-up activity in Cambodia. On December 3 Vietnam announced the formation of a Kampuchean United Front in Cambodia to fight against Pol Pot, thus giving a clear indication of some impending future action. Two days later the U.S. issued a warning to Vietnam that Hanoi's links with the Soviet Union imperiled future ties with the U.S.<sup>118</sup> New lines for an international balance of power in East Asia began to appear.

Vietnam, meanwhile, launched skirmishes into Cambodia securing key points for a massive offensive to be conducted later in the month. On December 13 China delivered a strong







protest to Hanoi complaining of new clashes along the Sino-Vietnamese border and in the Gulf of Tonkin. China threatened that there was "a limit to China's forbearance and restraint towards the armed provocations against China." Peking warned that Vietnam should not "complain later than we have not given you a clear warning in advance."<sup>119</sup> The propaganda buildup for the Chinese invasion was well under way.

On December 15 the U.S. and China normalized relations, the final peacetime accomplishment permitting military action against Vietnam. Immediately following normalization, China deployed its forces from across the Taiwan Strait north to the Soviet borders and south to the Vietnam border, and placed its forces in Kwangsi and Yunnan provinces on alert.<sup>120</sup> Statements made by Hua during an unprecedented news conference in China exposed the close relationship between normalization of U.S. relations and the attack on Vietnam. Hua said U.S.-China relations would "contribute to the anti-hegemony struggle" and, China "would continue to struggle against big and small hegemonists, both global and regional hegemony."<sup>121</sup>

Although Vietnamese troops remained virtually motionless in Cambodia, as long as Vietnam continued to hope the U.S. would normalize relations with Vietnam rather than China. Vietnam grew more restless as the border situation with China worsened. In December China claimed it was invaded by "dozens of Vietnamese armed personnel" and the next day China warned that if Vietnam strikes China again, it "will certainly counterattack."<sup>122</sup>



On Christmas Day, 1978, Vietnam launched its invasion in force against Cambodia. Vietnam needed only fifteen days to attain its main military objectives. Phnom Penh fell on January 7, 1979, and two days later the Vietnamese and anti-Pol Pot Cambodian rebels were seen advancing unopposed toward the Thai border. On January 11 the new forces in Phnom Penh announced the formation of the Peoples Republic of Cambodia under Heng Sam rin.

Cambodia's desperate situation left the Pol Pot regime with little initiative. In the United Nations Ieng Sary and then the rehabilitated Prince Sihanouk presented the case for condemning Vietnamese aggression. On January 15, 1979 the U.S.S.R. vetoed the resolution of the United Nations Security Council calling for Vietnam's removal of its forces from Cambodia.

China remained as Cambodia's only hope for outside assistance. On January 11, Ieng Sary undertook a very delicate mission to China,<sup>123</sup> to confer on possible Chinese invasion of Vietnam, in order to relieve Vietnamese pressure on Cambodia. But China needed time to get its own case in order. During Teng's visit to the U.S., China persented its rationale for an attack on Vietnam. On January 30 Teng averred, "In the interests of world peace and stability and in the interest of our country, we may be forced to do what we do not like to do." Teng denounced Vietnam's "massive armed aggression" adding that China would



"not hesitate even to shoulder the necessary sacrifices to uphold international justice and the long-term interests of world peace and stability."<sup>124</sup> China had no intentions of appearing as an aggressor. Teng took every opportunity to denounce the Soviet world hegemonist who was behind Vietnam's actions by decrying the Soviet Union's attempts to subjugate Southeast Asia and the world.

China's aims were to stem the tide of Soviet expansionism but that was not the immediate reason for China's attack on the Vietnamese. The November 3 treaty between the U.S.S.R. and Vietnam transformed Hanoi from a political ally of the U.S.S.R. to a military ally. It was probably the last straw in convincing China that it would undertake military action if necessary against Vietnam, not only to support China's own ally, Cambodia, but also to thwart the expansionism of Vietnam and the hegemonism of the U.S.S.R. using Vietnam as its surrogate, its Cuba in Asia. Teng returned to China on February 8 after a stopover in Japan where he publicly hinted at the possibility of an attack on Vietnam. His plans must have been definite in his own mind because within a week after his return to Peking on February 17, he gave the orders for the invasion of Vietnam.

The fate of Cambodia hung in the balance and no one was certain how far the Chinese would go in their pedagogical war to teach the Vietnamese a lesson. And no one could be sure if the Russians would undertake to teach the Chinese a lesson on behalf of their Vietnamese ally.



## VI. CONCLUSION

Under the control of Le Duan and company, Vietnam today is no longer an independent and sovereign country but one subservient to a foreign power economically, politically, militarily and diplomatically.<sup>1</sup>

This statement was made by Hoang Van Hoan, Vice Chairman of the Vietnamese National Assembly and one of the founders of the Vietnamese Communist Party, speaking from Peking after his defection from Hanoi on July 3, 1979.

In his August 9 declaration, Hoan spoke of serious divisions and opposition to the oppressive Le Duan regime; he equated the policies of Vietnam to towards the ethnic Chinese as "even worse than Hitler's treatment of the Jews." But prevalent in his thinking was that the erroneous policies of Le Duan sacrificed and threatened to turn that country "into a source of raw materials, a processing plant and a military base serving the interests of a foreign power." Significantly, Hoan points to the year 1969 following Ho Chi Minh's death as the beginning of the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations.<sup>2</sup>

Le Duan's effusive admiration for all things Soviet including the U.S.S.R.'s brand of international communism was one reason for the tilt to the Soviet Union. However, there was a more concrete benefit to be gained by association with the U.S.S.R. Vietnam had long aspired for leadership of an Indochinese Federation as the first step for its expanding







into a regional power. China, however, preferred to be surrounded by friendly but weak neighbors and would not support Vietnam's hegemonistic goals. If Vietnam wished to one day fulfill its dreams, it had no choice but to join in a closer association with the U.S.S.R. who in turn benefited by advancing its strategy of encircling China.

Through the war years against the United States, North Vietnam, by necessity, retained the Chinese association, but after the war it more openly aligned itself with the Soviet camp. Even prior to April 1975 the Soviet-Vietnamese partnership was noticeable. It was the U.S.S.R. which provided the military muscle for North Vietnam to prevail ultimately over the might of the United States. In 1974 the Soviet Union sided with North Vietnam against China over the Paracel Islands. Finally, the April 1975 offensive into South Vietnam resulting in victory was planned with Soviet assistance.

Soviet backing was most important for Vietnam to achieve its aims of hegemon- in Indochina. However, Hanoi did not wish for a total break with China which continued to furnish a large portion of Vietnam's economic aid. This contributed to Vietnam's backing down in a 1975 confrontation with Cambodia and Hanoi's reliance on subversion to undermine an independent Khmer Rouge regime. By 1977 Vietnam had adequately consolidated North and South Vietnam allowing more blatant actions against Cambodia to force Phnom Penh's acquiescence in joining an Indochinese Federation led by



Hanoi. Cambodia's jealously guarded independence, however, meant nothing short of an invasion could fulfill Hanoi's goals.

Vietnam's first invasion of Cambodia in 1977 was conducted in relative secrecy, but its failure and Cambodia's decision to make its problems with Vietnam public knowledge, necessitated a diplomatic offensive to neutralize potential opponents. The success of this venture resulted in Vietnam's Christmas invasion in 1978. China refused to be deterred, however, and managed to achieve a great power diplomatic position which contributed to Russia's keeping out of the Chinese-Vietnamese fighting.

In analyzing the events of April 1975 to February 1979, this study would offer the following conclusions about the hypotheses which were stated in the introduction.

It seems to have been amply demonstrated that the S.R.V. has long entertained a desire for a position of leadership on the Indochina peninsula. The S.R.V. constantly conducted its diplomacy with its neighbors with the double purpose of strengthening its own position and weakening its potential adversaries. It has displayed masterful skills in playing both ends against the middle. It has alternated the use of the carrot and the stick--that is, negotiating and fighting--in dealing with ASEAN as an organization and with each member state as an individual sovereign power.

The S.R.V. doggedly linked its efforts to put its own puppets in charge in Phnom Penh with its various invasion



initiatives. It was when the deep Cambodian spirit of nationalism refused to compromise with Vietnamese demands that the Vietnamese were driven to rely on naked force. This accounts for the Christmas invasion of 1978.

On the larger diplomatic scene, the S.R.V. tried to neutralize any possible American opposition to its Cambodian ambitions by seeking normalization of diplomatic relations. In this endeavor, the S.R.V. lost out to China. At the outset, the S.R.V. tried to carry water on two shoulders--to enjoy the blessing of both its communist allies. Again it was unsuccessful. China supported Cambodia and the S.R.V. was forced to turn to Russia. It was finally the conclusion of the formal U.S.S.R.-S.R.V. treaty of alliance which gave the S.R.V. the courage to go all-out in invading Cambodia.

It was that same alliance which sheds light on much of China's international diplomatic maneuvering and gave China the determination to relieve the pressure on Cambodia by attacking Vietnam. China was determined--but cautiously so--to thwart the schemes of Vietnam for hegemony in Indochina and of Russia for tightening the circle around China by reliance on its Vietnamese surrogate. And it is conclusions such as these that American policymakers will have to bear in mind as they search for the best American position in the evolving quest for equilibrium of forces in East and Southeast Asia.



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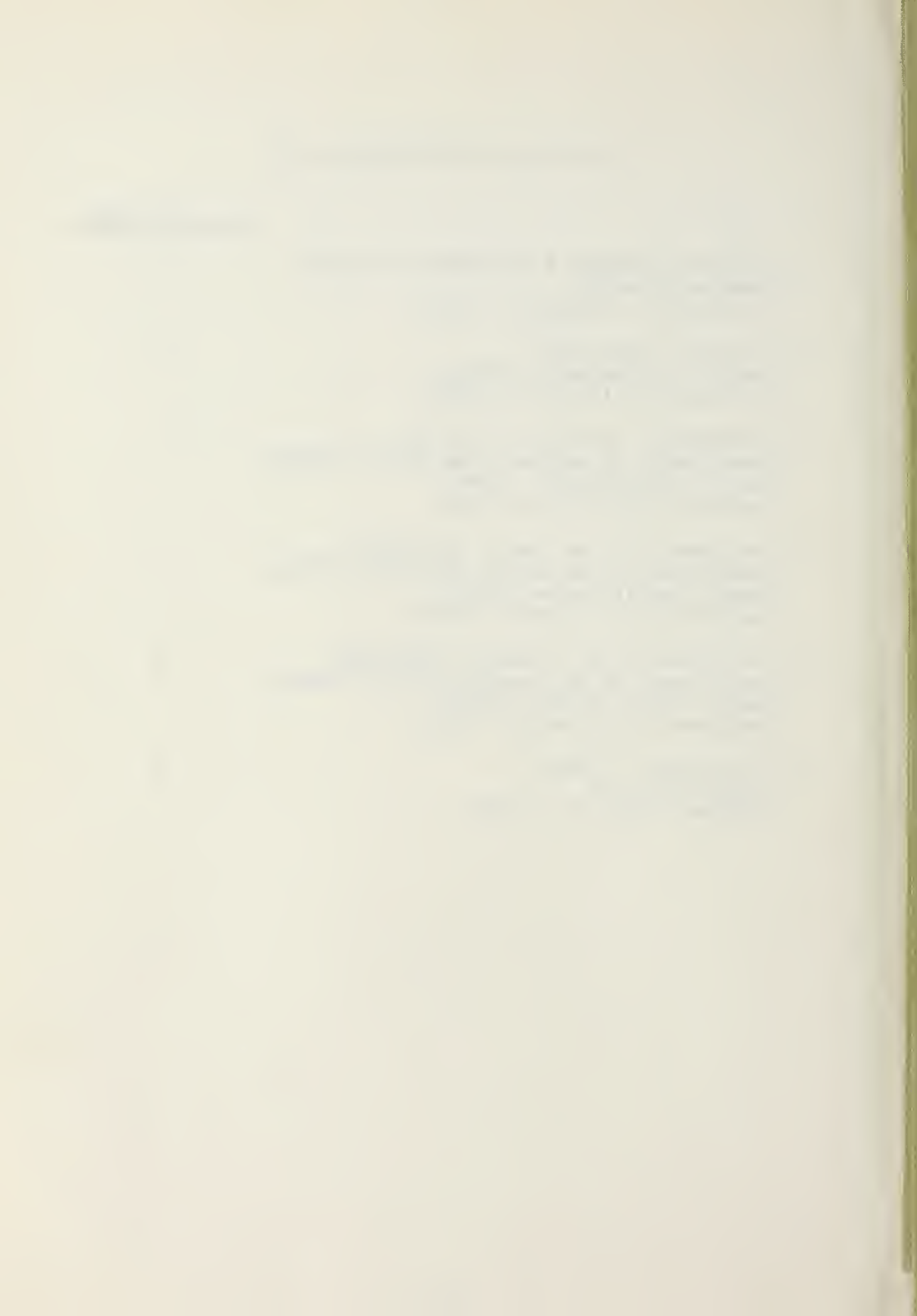
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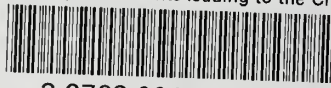
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